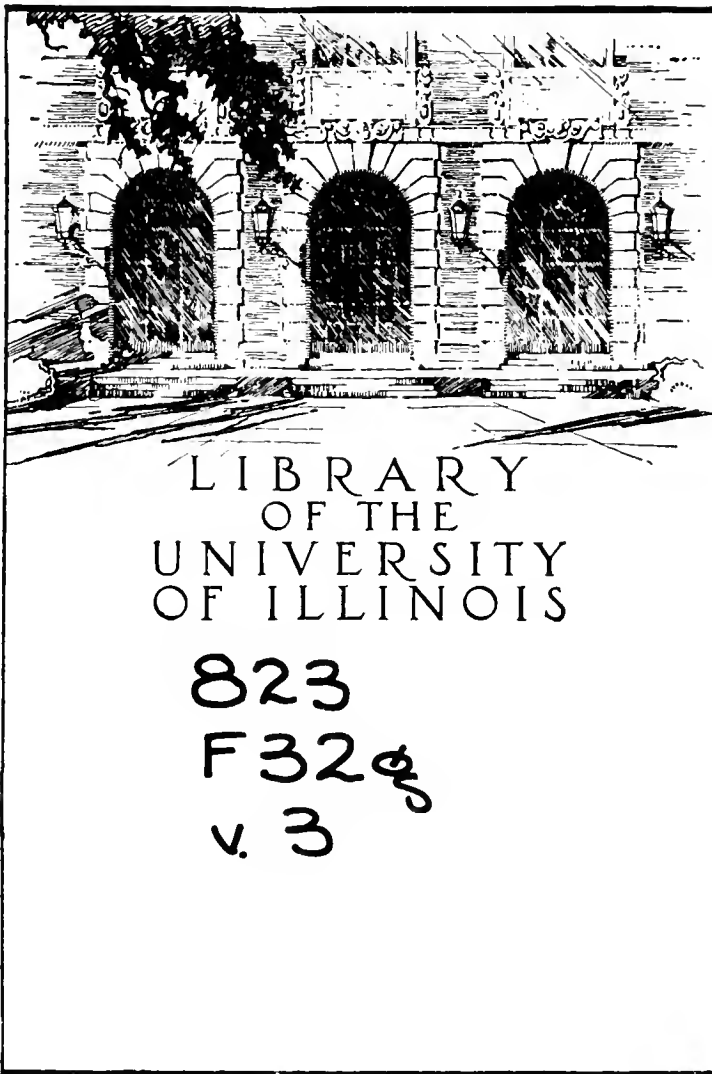




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GRANTHAM SECRETS.

GRANTHAM SECRETS.

A Novel.

BY

PHŒBE M. FEILDEN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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GRANTHAM SECRETS.



CHAPTER I.

AN, the bitter thoughts with which Mrs. Willoughby seated herself in the sick-room ! No one, looking at the quiet determination expressed in her sorrowful face, would have guessed at the whirlwind of self-upbraidings working in the depths of her heart. For, up above the storms, rested a motionless iceberg of despair ; and, up above the despair, her thoughts were moving slowly and methodically in a circling chain, which brought them round and round again to the beginning from which they had started. And over and above the thoughts with which her mind tried to re-arrange matters already settled, and to do away with disastrously in-

evitable résultats, sounded again in the ears of her memory, and shocked her again with a terrible shock, Sir John Grantham's words, revealing those strange things which all in a moment had seemed to uproot and change her whole being from its very foundation. And over and above those startling communications, sounded the words in which he had carried on the tale that he had told her. Round and round, over and over again, she repeated to herself that tale in all its details,—or rather it seemed to be repeating itself again and ever again, in Sir John Grantham's voice, almost in his own words.

The tale had been as follows:—

“Some thirty years ago last summer, I left home to keep a yachting engagement. My wife would have accompanied me, but was not in fit state of health for the exertion. I was very unwilling to leave her, but was urged on all hands to go, and she declared that she should be happy with our sister-in-law, Mrs. Grantham, and her boy Miles, who had promised to keep her company during my absence. ‘Happy’ in that

society ! Good heavens, that I could have left her to the tender mercies of the woman whom, at the bottom of my heart, I had always distrusted, as one distrusts an adder ! However, I went ; and madam made herself extremely useful and extremely agreeable, within and beyond the Hall. Charming creature !—sympathizing and tender companion ! So ready with hospitalities in her neighbour's house !—taking all trouble off the shoulders of her weakly sister,—so generous with other people's property !—so winning,—so ready with her advice and assistance to sick and poor ! In short,—the adored of all the world of Grantham and Darlingster ! Some people of the name of Meredith had settled themselves for a year at Hatherford House,—you know it,—a desolate out-of-the-way place, between Grantham and Darlingster. They were in trouble when they came, and we had not called, having heard that they wished to be left to themselves. But madam must needs coax the Darlingster apothecary,—a coarse drunken beast of an old-fashioned ignorant country-

practitioner he was,—into persuading her that she might be of service to Mrs. Meredith, and that it would be a charity to call upon her. From this scoundrel, I believe, she learnt that the poor lady's health was in a very low and unsatisfactory condition ; and that if she lived to give birth to the child she was expecting, it was almost impossible that the baby could be born alive. However, she called, made herself necessary to the invalid, became extremely intimate as the one only guest admitted at Hatherford House, recommended a nurse, and was looked upon as a godsend by this poor creature, who had no one else to depend upon in her need, except her inexperienced medical attendant. The nurse whom she recommended was a Mrs. Byrom, a widowed sister of your late gardener, Gilling. She was a handsome, clever, and apparently respectable woman, a good deal younger than her brother, and with manners and appearance much beyond her position. Her husband had been a tolerably well-to-do tradesman, but having failed latterly, at

his death had left her ill provided for. In spite of her poverty, however, she retained her fine manners; and, considering herself far too grand a lady to have anything to do with a labouring man, had contrived to pick a quarrel with her brother. But my sister-in-law had effected a reconciliation between the brother and sister. Both were her *protégés*, and both became her devoted slaves. When first she had made Gilling's acquaintance, she had found him in miserable plight, out of work, a widower with one little boy, declaring that he was going to wrack and ruin, all for want of a wife to take care of him, and keep things together for him. The woman whom he wished to make his wife was, as you probably know, Mary Elstree, a widow, who had loved him before the husband whom she had lost; but after her husband's death, she had returned, with her sick girl, to her old father's house; and Mrs. Grantham had discovered her crying over the difficulty of making both ends meet, and over her resolution never to leave her infirm old father,—never to marry

the man she loved,—unless she could take him with her to her husband's home. Here was a double case, calling for compassion and interference!

“Madam was good enough to find employment and sleeping-room for Gilling on my estate; board and lodging for his boy at the village school-house,—at my expense; a temporary home in a hospital for Mary Elstree's sick girl; some one to take charge, for a short time, of her old father; and, for herself, means of earning something as temporary nurse to Lady Grantham. She had, in the first instance, made arrangements with a London nurse on Lady Grantham's behalf; but had persuaded Ida that it would be as well to be provided for, in case of disappointment, delay, or a sudden emergency. How many plots this cunning contriver may have had working in her brain at once, I don't pretend to know; but in all probability she had many arrows to her bow, and had so ingeniously laid her plans as to be prepared for varying action, according to varying events. However this may have

been, circumstances could not have fallen out so as to suit her views better than they did. She completely took in my poor wife ; and, as I have said, she was looked upon as a paragon of perfection throughout the parish.

“ Well, meanwhile,—that is, while she was carrying out all her benevolent schemes at Grantham,—I was extremely enjoying my yachting expedition. I felt, of course, a certain amount of anxiety on my wife’s account, but this was allayed at intervals, by the letters which brought me continual good accounts from home ; and, as a whole, joyful anticipations got the better of uneasiness. The being childless during the first years of our married life, had been a severe trial and disappointment to my wife and myself. Now, at last, there was a prospect of our long-disappointed hopes being fulfilled. Naturally, my heart was set on the expected child being a boy. Since the first year of our marriage, I had been hungering after a son and heir, and now, like a fool, I had begun to indulge in delicious day-dreams, in which my heart already thrilled with love for the son who

was yet unborn. Early in August I was in London, on my way home. The birth of the child had not been looked for until the end of the month. Great, therefore, was the surprise and excitement with which I found at my hotel, in Dover Street, a letter from my sister-in-law informing me that the event had already taken place. A little over-exertion and over-excitement, she told me, had caused a somewhat premature confinement; but my wife was ‘going on nicely,’ and she *hoped* that the ‘tiny boy,’—I have not forgotten the wording of the letter,—was also ‘doing well.’

“In my joy at hearing that the matter was safely over, in my delight at reading the word ‘boy,’ I forgot to curse the woman who had so far neglected her charge, as to allow her to over-exert herself! I overlooked the doubtful tone in which she mentioned the health of the baby.

“I hastened home in a state of buoyancy and hope impossible to express. Never before had the Grantham estate appeared to me so beautiful. Never had I looked with

the same pride at the splendid trees between which runs the avenue which took me up to my hall-door. Never before had it given me equal pleasure to look at the fine old hall, where son had succeeded father for centuries,—for now I, too, had a son to succeed me,—when I died from off the earth my earthly life would still have continuance in him. I should still live on in his love and memory! My son! How I loved him already! Before I reached the house, I had forgotten all possibility of disappointment. The first face that met my eyes was that of Mrs. Grantham. Overflowing at the moment with sensations of affection towards all my fellow-creatures, I had been prepared to greet the sister-in-law whom I abhorred all lovingly. But the very sight of her countenance, in its studied, pitying lugubriousness, struck a chill to my heart, and re-awakened all my former sensations of dislike and suspicion,—the sight of her, and the sight of that boy of hers, whose hand she held within her own! Hypocritical little imp! I see him now, with one tear upon

his cheek (I believe she had struck him a blow in order to produce this desired effect!), and the humbugging turn of his prim lips.

“ ‘My poor wee Miles!’ his mother said to me afterwards, ‘he feels it so! It is the loss to him of a *brother*! and he has such strong feelings, poor pet!’

“ The child was not four years old at the time; perhaps it was unreasonable to entertain such an aversion from him as I did, and had done. How I detested him at that instant! But I chose to ignore the evil which the old vulture,—the ill-favoured bird of ill-omen,—had too surely made apparent to me.

“ ‘How is Ida?’ I asked, in my briskest and liveliest tone.

“ ‘Doing nicely, dear John!’

“ She laid her hand on my arm as she answered. It seemed to me as if five vipers were coiling themselves about me, and I drew myself hastily away from her with a sensation of disgust and exclamation of impatience.

“ ‘Confound it!’ I cried, ‘can’t you speak? Can’t you tell me what is the matter?’

“ ‘ Hush, hush, dear John. Your dear wife does not know ; she is very, very weak. She has been at the point of death.’

“ I broke away from her. I hurried upstairs. At the top of the stair-case, I met Mary Elstree, with scared face. I hurried past her, and on,—not into my wife’s room, but to the nursery, where lay a dead child ! I believed, at the time, that the little wasted form was all that remained to me of my son ; I believed that that woman, directly or indirectly, had had a hand in his death ! Until a few weeks ago, I never doubted that the loss for which she made me nearly break my heart was a genuine death loss !

“ Years, bringing new hopes, and new disappointments, passed over my head, after that ; but through them all, and through the time that has gone by since,—through all my enjoyment of life, through all my forgetfulness (God forgive me) of death and of a better life, not a day has come to an end without *that* death, *that* grief, *that* disappointment returning to my mind with all the freshness of its earliest days. But a few

weeks ago, strange rumours began to be afloat throughout the neighbourhood, strange thoughts and fancies seemed to have entered people's heads. Some suspicions of these fancies had been whispered for some time, it was said; but when at last they reached my ears, they appeared to me a cruel mockery,—mere idle tales, given out by some vain and heartless gossip. Soon I began to associate the name of Miss Crayford with this heartless mischief-maker. I had reason to suppose that the young lady had motives of her own for getting up these stories; and when one day she came to see me, and told me, in the most winning and pathetic of her manners, that she had an important communication to make, I had little inclination to listen to, or believe, her tale. However, I let her tell it; and though I began to hear it incredulously, as she went on I found my attention arrested by it, whether I would or no. I found myself believing it. It commended itself to my mind as truth. And before she had finished telling it, it had transported me into a world of overwhelmingly joyful hope,

which must, I felt, lead me to a heaven of joyful certainty. It told me that the dead baby that I had found in my nursery had not been my baby. It told me that a change had been effected between the two children born in the neighbourhood at the same time. It told me that my son had lived to grow up, that I had seen him, spoken with him. All that it told me has been corroborated since, and I have learnt that, but for the indulgence of a lady's whim, but for her cruel interference on account of this whim, my living son might now be standing by my side. Through that selfishly indulged whim, joy has been changed into bitterness, life has been sacrificed!"

Ah, the look and tone, of quiet, bitter, despairing severity which had accompanied these last words as they were spoken! At first they had seemed to strike through Mrs. Willoughby's heart like a knife, and then it had appeared to her as though her heart had suddenly been turned into ice, sending a death-like chill through all the blood in

her veins, and transforming her into a motionless statue,—so that when he paused, keeping his eyes steadily fixed upon her, she had not had a word to say, she had not had a look to give ; he might have been gazing at a corpse for all the sign of feeling that she showed.

“ I am afraid I fatigue you,—I am afraid I make your head ache ! ” he had said, at length, with a mocking smile.

Had she reached hell, and was he a torturing devil, sent to smite her with the sense of her selfish life ? If it were so, she had no cry with which to express her anguish,—she could not answer him a word. Dead,—but in agony !—in everlasting despair ! So it seemed to her now that she would have expressed the sensations which again, through her memory, came numbingly over her soul.

“ I will not keep you much longer,” he had gone on, “ and then I will ring the bell for Jane to come to your relief, with *sal volatile* and *eau-de-cologne* ; but you must hear me out, that you may know that I

have spoken truth. Miss Crayford has been visiting old Gilling with pious regularity; and having heard the mutterings to himself, with allusions to some secret by which he was oppressed, to which it was his wont, unconsciously, to give vent from time to time, cleverly putting two and two together, she had proceeded judiciously to worm out from him a confession of his guilt. By his showing, my sister-in-law had bribed the three of them,—himself, his sister, and the doctor,—and they had effectually managed the business for her. But his wife, as Mary Elstree afterwards became, was innocent of everything but being faithful to the promise which he had extorted from her,—for his sake bearing, with an uneasy conscience, the secret which she was continually urging him to divulge. The night before my son was born, Mrs. Meredith had given birth to a miserable, scarcely living child. There was little difficulty in deceiving his poor mother, for she was scarcely in a state to recognise even her baby, until the substitution of another for it had been made. Her husband was

not a man to be easily tricked, but was too much occupied with his wife's precarious state,—which the doctor took good care to exaggerate,—to take much heed of the newborn baby, or to notice anything extraordinary in the nurse's jealous guarding, in a darkened corner, of her sickly little charge. And at the Hall the matter was a very simple one. During the night after my boy's birth, Mrs. Grantham, always considerate, took the principal part of the watching and nursing on to her own shoulders, and having given the nurse what she called a reviving draught, bade her lie down and rest for a short time with the baby. The draught had been drugged, and when, at dead of night, Gilling brought into the nursery a dead baby, and carried a living one away with him, Mary Elstree was sleeping heavily. When——”

It was at this point that Mr. Thomas' entrance had brought an interruption to the story, and days passed before Mrs. Willoughby learnt farther particulars in connection with it; but it will best be continued

here, without Sir John Grantham's intervention as a medium.

When Mrs. Elstree awakened from her heavy slumber by the dead baby's side, Gilling, with a peculiar expression on his face such as she had never seen there before, was standing looking down upon her. She started with horror as she awoke. Where had she been? Was she still dreaming? What had happened? What had happened that was dreadful? What had she been doing that was wicked? Ah, the baby! She had been away from it in sleep! She had not been true to her charge. The baby! The precious baby!—*her* baby, whom she had already begun to love, and in whom she already felt to have gained a kind of possession. Almost as she awoke,—while the waking fear, consternation, semi-recollection, and wonder were over her, and while she fixed her eyes on her intended, and spoke his name in a tone of wondering horror, which eloquently asked what business he had in her nursery,—with a nurse's instinct she stretched out her hand

to feel for the baby. But at the same moment he seized her arm in his strong grasp, and bade her look at him, and listen.

“The baby’s right enough, and don’t want you,” he said. “I have something to tell you, before I will let you look at him again, something wonderful,—lucky news for you, my girl!—but before I tell you, you must promise not to repeat a word of it to a single person, till I say you may.”

“Promise! Oh, Jem, there’s something wicked about you! I ain’t going to promise nothing!” she cried.

But his manner was reassuring, and, through his tenderness and his beseeching and mysterious tone, he at length constrained her to make the required promise.

“It might be the death of me, if you did not promise,” he said.

“The death of him! Death!” Ah, death indeed, seemed to be abroad! A vague terror seized her,—why was the baby so strangely still? What was the cold air that seemed to breath through the room,

and chill her to the heart? When would he free her, and let her turn to her baby? Yes,—a vague terror had seized her; but, through all, love and trust for and in her lover were paramount. What were these mysteries,—these wonders of good or evil? She must learn them! She gave the promise.

Then in a mysterious whisper he said, “Mary, it is for his own good, but—your baby’ve gone. Nay, don’t go for to look like that, you have no need for to take on! Our good kind lady knows about it,—you would not be so unthankful as not to trust the like of her? What I has to say to you, Mary, is this: you would be doing her an injury if you talked of it to any one. She’ve let *me* know more, but I ain’t to tell any one else, not even you, more than you knows now, yet awhile,—not till we’re married; but that will be soon, now that our kind lady have been so good to us.”

Her baby gone! Gone! She broke away from Gilling in great excitement, and, turning to look, burst out into sudden un-

controllable weeping and wailing over the poor little waxen-like figure in the cradle, and over thoughts of the living baby that had been taken away. But her lover was quickly by her side, soothing her, hushing her, lulling her suspicions of evil to rest, assuring her that she would “find it all right,” comforting her with thoughts of her own child, who, through Mrs. Grantham’s bounty, was getting cured in an hospital, and reminding her of the good things in store for her with him, and the blessing she would be to him and his boy.

Finally, he left her in a state of utter bewilderment, amidst which, grief, pain, a sense of having been betrayed into unknown evil, a sense of evil working about her, mingled with a glad excitement and love,—which in themselves seemed wrong,—and an unbounded trust in the lover who was true to her, and in the lady who had not only been a benefactor to herself and her beloved ones, but whose whole life seemed to be made up of sacrifice for others. She could not understand the thing,—something was

the matter,—perhaps Mrs. Grantham was endeavouring to counteract the effects of some wrong-doing in another,—she could not understand, but she could trust those whom she loved, and those who were wiser and better than herself. Her promise had been given. It should be sacred. She would keep it always, whatever temptation to the contrary might arise. She would keep it, until her husband should loose her from its bondage, She would keep it, waiting, hoping, trusting that light would fall to clear away the mysterious cloud that was overshadowing her life. And though troubled thoughts and feelings from time to time came back and gained upon her, she never wavered from her determination to hold firmly and steadfastly to the vow which had been earnestly and solemnly given to her lover. Her trial was a hard one, from that very day which had just dawned! It was hard to be true in word, while she stood, like a guilty thing, amidst the concerned questioning of the household whose joy had been turned into sorrow by the news that

the long-looked-for son and heir had only been born to die! It was hard to have to look into the face of her sorrowful and perhaps dying mistress, and to have no word to say but one of hypocritical consolation.

It did indeed seem, for a while, as though Lady Grantham were at the point of death. The tidings that her boy was dead had reached her suddenly, and had affected her seriously. What would Mrs. Grantham have cared if her sister-in-law had actually died? It might have been for her boy's interest if it had been so, and yet again, perhaps it was safer that she, with her weakly constitution, should be allowed to creep back into some sort of life again, than that she should die to leave room for a new wife, with possibilities of a troop of strong and healthy sons to follow. Looking forward to the future, Mrs. Grantham judged it best to let things take their chance, for the poor mother whose dear hopes she had been the means of crushing, and whose health she had been the means of materially injuring.

With these thoughts in her heart, she stooped lovingly over her sister-in-law, soothed her, sympathised with her, and with tenderest regret, refused, "by the doctor's orders," she said, to allow her to see the dead body of her baby.

"It would only pain you, darling," she said; "*he* is not there,—the sweet boy lives in a beautiful world, watching you, awaiting a future reunion with his mother! Ah, you surely would not bring him back again, into this world of pain and sorrow!"

What a tender sister and nurse the bereaved mother had in Mrs. Grantham! What a sweet comforter she had in little Miles! So felt Lady Grantham when she began to get about again, and it added to her trouble that her husband could not feel the same. It was sad that his grief and disappointment about the child should have made him bitter and suspicious, she thought, and that everything she said on the subject should only seem to harden his feelings the more.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Grantham carried out

her benevolent plans for Gilling and Mary Elstree. She added to the cottage which Mary's father rented, so as to make it large enough to hold the married couple, as well as the old man and children; interested herself in obtaining regular work at a neighbouring farm for Gilling; set Mary up with washing apparatus; and, finally, when all the simple arrangements for the wedding of her protégés had been duly made, invited herself to the Hall, in order that she might grace it by her presence.

On the evening before the marriage, her work at home being finished, Mary was taking a quiet stroll through the lane that turned up from her father's cottage, by the side of a wood on the Grantham estate. As she walked along, she overheard voices up above her, in the wood,—

“My conscience ain't rightly clear, ma'am. I feel a'most as though I'd been a murderer, down-right,—let alone a robber; I don't feel comfortable about taking all this here money, and a-keeping of my girl in the dark, and all.” Jem Gilling was the speaker,

and Mrs. Grantham broke in hurriedly with an answer, but Mary hastened on. She had overheard enough. She did not wish to be an eavesdropper. She had heard enough to re-awaken, and render more definite, certain vaguely-sleeping suspicions which had now and again disturbed her rest. With sudden resolution, she determined that, even at this last moment, she would give up her marriage with Gilling, unless he would undo the wrong that he had done, and restore to the woman on whose character a new light had fallen, for her, the wages by means of which she had tempted him to do it. She expected him to visit her that evening,—then she would speak. But he did not come! All night long she lay ruminating and resolving bitterly. Early in the morning she arose, got forward with the housework, and went, with her blanched and haggard face, to the door of the out-house that formed her intended temporary lodging. There was a sudden shuffling sound, followed by a clink-clink, as from the fall of money, causing, apparently, a

little delay before the door was opened. Then a scowl on Gilling's face changed, first into a surprised smile, and afterwards into a look of frightened concern. "Bless me, Moll!" he ejaculated, in his flurry; but before he could get any farther, Mary had broken in with the explanation of her visit.

"Ah, Mary, you don't know all as I know, or you would not judge me so hardly, nor the lady either," began her intended. And when at his wits' end for arguments, he brought all the power of his love to bear down upon her resolutions, and put them to flight by the force of its truth, which seemed to bring with it an earnest of truthfulness throughout his character. "Surely she must be wronging him!" she thought.

"I will explain all, when I can, sweetheart," said Gilling. "I do not deny that there's some matter to blame, but, trust me, all shall be put straight; and I will not be beholden to her a moment longer than I can help. I promise,—I promise faithfully, to confess everything, as soon as I am able. Oh, Mary, do not be hard upon me!"

He gave the promise with excited fervour, really believing, at the moment, that when once married to her, some way out of his difficulty would be found,—that all difficulties, all fear of Mrs. Grantham's anger, all care for her money, would be lost in the satisfaction of his life-long love for Mary. And his face, as he prayed his prayer, was so full of loving pathos, that,—how could she be hard upon him?

She relented. She accepted his promise. She cast aside her fears. And the wedding came off.

Very soon after it, he had let her into the whole of his wicked secret! When reminded of his promise to make confession of his own part of the guilt, bear its penalty, and be the means of restoring the Grantham son and heir, he reminded Mary, in return, of her own solemn promise, and declared that he was himself bound by an equally solemn one to Mrs. Grantham. Ah, Mary was not likely to forget her own promise! She looked upon it as sacred. It lay like a sore burden upon her conscience; but it was

a burden from which she could not, she thought, be delivered, without committing a sin. It was a guilty burden, imposed upon her by her husband's sin, and for his sake it must be borne. It had come to her as the punishment of his ill-doing. Oh, if he could have known the pain of it! Oh, if he could have guessed that freedom from it would have been cheaply bought by poverty, starvation, bodily suffering, death,—even by separation from him who was dearer to her than life! Surely, if he could have known it, his love would have overcome the weakness which made him cling to the ill-gotten hoard of gold, which he was almost afraid to touch for use! Surely, his love would have overcome the cowardice which would not let him own his guilt, and brave the worst that could befall him! But while, day by day, she warned, besought, argued, and reminded him that he was only so long bound by his promise to Mrs. Grantham as he accepted her bounty,—he grew daily stronger and daily weaker,—stronger in dishonesty, more firmly bound by the love of

money and miserly propensities,—weaker so far as went the power of doing right, and bearing the dishonour and loss which confession would bring upon him. In short, while she, preferring to suffer rather than betray her husband,—rather than interfere where she considered that she had no business to interfere, in order to set matters straight,—while she, amidst mistakes, and folly, and evil, yet rose daily, “from her dead self to higher things,” he was sinking daily, sinking lower in the scale of morals. But with her, too, there was a daily growth in weakness, with her daily growth in strength. For while her spirit strengthened, through the very pain of her married life, physically her strength was gradually wearing away. She grew old before her time. When, a few years after her marriage, her father died, and she and her husband together entered Mrs. Willoughby’s service,—he as gardener, she as nurse,—she had already almost earned by her looks the title of “Old Nurse,” which was quickly awarded to her.

The neighbours wondered why she should “look so sadly,” as they expressed it, when all things prospered with her, so that they could have found it in their hearts to envy her. She did not seem to be ill, like anybody else, they thought. She just seemed as though she were pining away from the effects of some secret grief. And yet, what possible grief could she have? She had a kind husband to love, and be loved by. Her sick girl had grown strong. Her husband’s son was dear to her, as a son of her own. Mrs. Grantham continued to pour down benefits upon her and hers,—had got a good place for her girl, had taken the boy to be her own page, and given him schooling, and had recommended her husband to Mrs. Willoughby, when she came to The Cottage with her baby daughter Margaret, and was looking about for a new nurse and for a gardener. At The Cottage she had every comfort, and received all regard and affection. And when she began to find her strength failing her too much for service, and Margaret had out-grown the necessity

for a nurse's care, the gardener's wife, in her comfortable little cottage-home close at hand, continued to be an object of interest and attention to Mrs. Willoughby and her daughter. In fact, life seemed, in all ways, to smile upon her, and yet even Margaret observed, wonderingly, that she did not smile in return, upon life,—she who was no discontented grumbler, by nature, but a genial-hearted, grateful, loving woman!

“Mamma, why does nurse always look as if she was afraid of somebody dying?” asked little Margaret, one day.

“My dear, she is in weak health, and fancies herself worse than she is; she does not know what it is always to suffer from headache, and to be obliged to exert herself for the sake of her child!” characteristically answered Mrs. Willoughby, with a feeble martyr's sigh, but at the same time cutting slices of chicken for Margaret to carry down to her dear old nurse. Her mother must be right, Margaret supposed, and she tried to cheer up the invalid with hopes of better health.

And so the years rolled on, without any one guessing at nurse Gilling's grievous secret, and her sympathising friends in vain tried to comfort her. Mrs. Grantham and her son Miles alone knew what the burden was that was oppressing her; and various causes kept Mrs. Grantham away from the place where she had played her cards so well, and where she felt she could trust her son (whom, on his arrival at years of discretion, she had found it advisable to make her confidant and accomplice) to be equally skilful, and equally successful,—“her son Miles!”—from whom that “curious cranky old woman,” as Jane, the lady's-maid, was pleased to term poor old nurse Gilling, seemed to have formed such an unaccountable aversion!

The years rolled on, and brought at last to Margaret those pleasant summer weeks which added to her old nurse's trouble, and increased the sickness which ended in her death (a sickness and death which seemed in some mysterious manner to connect themselves, in Margaret's mind, with the sorrow

which had followed upon her spell of summer felicity). And then, while Margaret wondered, vaguely, what her nurse's death-song might portend, and what the meaning of old Gilling's dark fancies and mournful mutterings might be, war between light and darkness took place in the old man's spirit.

The years sped on once more,—and darkness gained its way, but light would not let the old man alone, although he cried to himself, "Peace, peace, where there was no peace." Life and money, he thought, were sweet, whatever else might be bitter. It was sweet to see the money rolling up, and to know that a fortune was to descend from him to his boy. It was sweet to feel the gold in his hand, and to know that nobody would rob him of it,—that nobody knew of his secret but those for whose interest it was that he should keep it. Thus he would say to himself, between the intervals of anguish, remorse, and fear,—fear of the death which was always haunting his footsteps, which must surely overtake him at last,

and rob him of the treasures which the world allowed him to enjoy!

“Ah,” he would think, at the end of these intervals, making a compromise with his soul, “I must certainly confess before I die,—but there is time enough yet; I have many years’ strength and life in me still. I will wait until my last illness comes on, and then I will buy a snug farm for my boy; and then I will confess, and then I shall die at peace with all the world, and be able to meet my wife up there, with a clear conscience.”

At length this season seemed to be arriving. He became speedily more infirm. His health seemed to be failing him apace. His mutterings became more frequent. His eyes had a fearful startled look. In spirit he seemed to be absent from earth, and present with some terrible inner world of darkness, misery, and wickedness. Each night he said to himself,—

“To-morrow I will confess, I will rid me of my load!” Each morning found him once more binding his golden chains about

him. "I will wait another day," he said,—
"I will wait another day."

It was about this time that Miss Craycroft began to pay him "charitable visits." It was about this time that he began to be confiding to her, and that vague rumours of mysteries in connection with Grantham Hall, and its heir, began to excite the gossiping community of Grantham and its neighbourhood. But these rumours were quickly hushed, for Alice feared lest Miles should discover in her the motive power by which their train had been set going.

"Ah, if only without her interference the world would find out what she had begun more than to suspect! If only Sir John Grantham could learn that Miles was not his heir, the desire for his marriage with Margaret would be at an end on all sides. Miles would be free,—free to yield himself up to the indulgence of the love which she was convinced he really felt for her! Well, she must drag the whole truth out of old Gilling, and then work upon his feelings, until he

was made to feel the necessity of confession! But the carrying out of this resolution required much tact, care, and watchfulness. The old man was capricious, suspicious, drew in his horns from time to time, in fear or surliness, and puzzled and confused her by his contradictory statements. But, by degrees, he let the whole murder out, binding her as he did so to secrecy.

One day, however, she found him in a remorseful, weak, and miserable mood,—prepared to listen to statements to which he had hitherto lent a deaf ear. He found it a relief to go over old ground again, doing so excitedly, with many repetitions, pausing from time to time to call himself a miserable lost sinner, and ending by saying that Miss Craycroft was quite right, that he would follow her advice, would tell his secret to the Baronet and the clergyman, and thus make his peace with God and man before he died. When it came to the point, however, he could not summon strength of mind sufficient to agree to her proposal that he should send for Sir John. But he consented at length to.

allow her to tell the tale for him. Then it was that she went to the Hall, and, by her wonderful revelation, changed a long-standing grief into an overwhelmingly joyful hope. Sir John could not rest ; that very night he went to Gilling's cottage, to learn the truth from himself. Alas ! It was too late. The old man had been seized with a fit soon after Miss Craycroft had left him, and was still unconscious from the effects of it. He lingered for weeks after this attack ; but only very slightly recovered either mental or physical power. The doctor came, used remedies, and forbade agitation and effort. Sir John came, and tried to understand the old man's incoherent mutterings ; and to arouse him to sensible consciousness of the presence of him whom he had wronged, and of the important effort required of him. The clergyman came, and tried to awake in him repentance, and a sense of the great change at hand for him.

But he only grew the more feeble, for all the doctor's care. He only responded to the squire's words by vague looks into his

face, of terror and semi-recognition, or by piteously imploring murmurings. And when the clergyman spoke his words of warning or encouragement, the sinner only pointed anxiously towards the box which held his gold, and said,—

“Don’t’ee take it yet. I be going to die, I must leave it then;” and afterwards added, in eager contradiction, “There’s nothing there! I ain’t got a farthing to leave my lad. She wouldn’t let me keep it!”

But one day, Sir John received a message begging him to come down at once to the gardener’s cottage.

“He seems quite himself to-day, Sir John, and wants to see you very secret and particular,” said his son. “I ain’t to be with him. It’s about this ’ere thing that’s lain by him, and troubled him so long.”

Sir John eagerly obeyed the summons.

“Prop me up before you go, and give me a drop of something to put some strength in me, will yer, Jem?” gasped the old man, slowly, and so feebly that only his son could hear the words he spoke. “And mind you

don't let no one in, without it's the parson. If I don't do it now, I shall never do it."

And as soon as he was alone with Sir John, clutching tight hold of the bed-clothes with nervous excitement, he hissed out between his lips in a whisper of sudden desperation, "Did she tell you?"

"Yes, Gilling," began Sir John. "I want ____"

But before he could complete the sentence, a change had come into the old man's face,—a look, half of terror, half of defiance, and turning his eyes away from Sir John, he growled out between his clenched teeth, "It ain't true."

For an instant Sir John remained silent, in dismayed consternation, then stooping over the bed, "Not true, Gilling?" he said, imploringly. "Listen, think again? It *is* true, is not it?" But the only heed the old man took of his companion was to glare wildly into his face, while he muttered something unintelligible fiercely between his teeth. At the moment the clergyman entered; and having quickly gathered the state

of the case from Sir John, going up to the bedside, he fixed his eyes steadily on the sick man's face, and said, in a tone of voice that was at once sternly and tenderly reproachful, "Not true, Gilling,—think,—not true?"

"Not true," echoed the old man, in a sort of low, wild, moaning shriek,—“not true, not true.”

"Ay,—but you will soon be obliged to own before God that it *is* true; it will be too late to be of any good to those you have sinned against, then! You will have to say to your wife that you lied to the end!" said the clergyman, sternly.

"Lied to the end!" echoed the old man, in a frightened, despairing whisper,—“lied to the end!—lied to the end!”

"Own then, before God, now,—while it is not too late,—that it *is* true," said the clergyman.

"It *is* true," murmured the old man,—“ay, it *is* true!”

"He can hear you now, for you are in His Presence, and He knows if you speak the truth or lie," went on the clergyman.

“Ay, ay, truth or lie, truth or lie,” echoed the old man, while his eyes wandered as though in search of something. “Is it true? Will they take it?” he added, sorrowfully.

“Never mind if they do, for you will be glad if you are able to say to your wife that you were true at last.”

“True at last!” murmured Gilling, with a sigh as of relief,—“true at last!” and his face softened, while he added, “Polly, Polly!—true at last, wife,—true at last! Polly, Polly!” he called, in a pathetic tone, “Polly!” and a fleeting glimmer of light seemed to pass over his face, as he raised his head. But in a moment the gleam had vanished. He fell back exhausted, and all was dark for him then, and to the end of his outward existence.

Mr. Bowles was as fully convinced as Sir John himself of the truth of that which the old man had at last owned to be true; but would dying words, which might have been forced from him, obtain as evidence of any value in the eyes of others? How was the

matter to be proved? How was a sure light to be thrown on the imposture of Mrs. Grantham and her son Miles?

The first thing to be done, Sir John felt, was to endeavour to discover the whereabouts of Mrs. Byrom.

“Would not Miss Craycroft be able to throw some light for us here?” said Mr. Bowles, as he and Sir John were together in friendly consultation.

“Ay, I have been thinking,—it is just possible that she might have forked it out of Gilling. But I am afraid the grand lady kept herself too dark for her plebeian brother’s failing eye-sight.”

“At all events, he might have known what became of his sister after she left the Merediths’ service,” said the clergyman.

“And whatever he knew, the young lady is pretty sure to have learnt! Come along,—walk with me as far as the gate,—for I will go at once to see what I can get out of her,” returned Sir John, eagerly suiting action to words.

Alice was at home, and threw a vast

amount of indefinable feeling into her face, as she received the uncle of the discovered impostor whom she adored. But her manner changed, and was very peculiar, Sir John thought, as she answered his abruptly-put question relating to the matter that he had at heart.

“Yes, Sir John,” she replied, nervously, and in a tone expressing great agitation,—“yes, he told me that after Mrs. Byrom had quitted the Merediths’ service, which she did very soon after the birth of the babies,—and almost immediately after the family had left this neighbourhood,—she had got herself fitted to undertake a situation as nursery governess, and he supposed she must afterwards have become too great a lady to bestow any notice upon him and his wife,—for it was between twenty and thirty years since he had heard anything of her.”

“Thank you,” said Sir John, as Alice paused. “And this, then, is all the information that you are able to give me?”

To his surprise, his quietly-put question was answered by a sudden hysterical gasp-

ing shriek. After which, "Oh, don't, Sir John, don't compel me!" cried Alice, while she rose from her chair, pressed her hands together, and lifted her eyes imploringly to the ceiling. "Oh, ought I?—ought I? Oh, it is so dreadful,—so terrible,—so terrible! Papa knows,—papa knows more,—papa can tell you, if—if——"

"Pray don't disturb yourself, Miss Craycroft," returned Sir John. "Is Mr. Craycroft at home? Can I see him?"

"Papa is in town; he returns to-morrow," began Alice, "but I—if——"

"Not until to-morrow!" broke in Sir John, blankly. "What time do you expect him? If you will let me have his address, I will write and ask him if he could make it convenient to dine with me to-morrow. Good-bye, excuse me for having disturbed you, and——"

"But, Sir John,—oh, let me,—oh, may I, if I can? You are so anxious for *immediate* help,—and yet, oh, ought I? So many conflicting duties,—so many conflicting feelings!"

“You best know whether you are at liberty to give me farther information,” said Sir John, struggling not to betray his impatience too roughly.

“Oh, Sir John, you little know!—the anxiety to be of use,—the pain of refusing to help valued friends in need,—oh, ought I?—ought I? The press of natural feeling,—an own and only mother!”

“Has love for that humbug Miles driven the girl entirely out of what she may be pleased to consider her mind?” thought Sir John. He did not stay to inquire of her how many “own mothers” she believed it customary for a daughter to possess; but gathering hastily from her incoherent remarks that Mrs. Byrom must have turned out to be the daughter of some “valued friend,” perhaps “poor relation” of the Craycrofts, and that her hesitation to give information was more for effect’s sake than anything else, he determined to bring her to the mark, and retreated to the door, saying, “Pray do as you think best, Miss Craycroft. Do not let me distress you. I can wait until to-morrow.”

“No, stay, pray stay, Sir John! I will try,—I will tell you,—I will at all events make an effort ;” and then, with many twists and turns, pauses as though to regain breath, agitated exclamations, looks of pain, and a vast amount of incoherency, she told the story, which, bereft of her ornamentation, is in bare substance as follows :—

The clever, handsome, and superior-mannered widow, Mrs. Byrom, entered the family of a rich man of business,—a widower,—as half-nurse, half-governess to his little daughter.

When the child grew old enough to leave the nursery, Mrs. Byrom also left the nursery, and superintended, in the school-room, lessons which she little understood herself, besides over-looking household affairs, and becoming, in short, a kind of upper housekeeper. She did her work admirably, made herself liked by the whole household, succeeded by degrees in wholly fascinating its master, and ended in becoming his wife. A year after her marriage she had a little girl, who was speedily given

up to the care, first of nurses and then of governesses, while she enjoyed society, ruled her servants with a high hand, fascinated her husband, made herself generally popular in the world, and hated at home, by all excepting her husband, whose feeling for her, however, was rather of excessive admiration than love. Her step-daughter was sent to a boarding-school, tyrannised over, during the holidays, by her detested step-mother, and married at seventeen. A year or so later, this eldest daughter was staying with her husband at a place near Darlingster, and, in writing home, mentioned, as though casually, to her father, that, in looking over tomb-stones in the old Darlingster churchyard, she had come across the name of Byrom, and, on inquiry, had heard that he had been a tradesman in the town, and that his widow had been a handsome woman who gave herself airs, though she was obliged to earn her livelihood by going out as nurse. She supposed, by the way, that these Byroms could have no connection with her step-mother, but thought it just possible that she

might know something about them, as she remembered hearing her mention in conversation that some of her life had been passed in that part of the world. It so happened that the morning on which the letter came, a sparring, on some point or other, had taken place between the husband and wife, so that, as she heard the letter read, she was unnerved, and off her guard,—blushed furiously, became embarrassed, in vain tried to laugh the matter off; and finally burst out in loudly-indignant declamation against her step-daughter's impertinence. What business had Maria to go making insinuations of that sort? she asked. Her husband had already,—even before this incident,—begun to be a little disenchanted, and as a *finale* to the quarrel, he accepted his son-in-law's invitation to him to run down to the neighbourhood of Darlingster, to look at a newly-built house which was for sale. He had long been on the look-out for a country residence, and finding this exactly the thing to suit him, bought it, in spite of his wife's resolute determination that she would never go and

live there. The result was a separation between husband and wife, and the arrival at Arlington Villa of Mr. Craycroft and his daughter Alice, then a child of eight or nine years old.

“Of course,” said Alice, stopping short in her story, “of course I remember very little about poor dear mamma,—such a child as I was when she left us (*poor motherless little child!*), and she too much occupied to have me often with her! But I have a vision of her, a sweet vision of a lovely young creature! She erred,—no doubt she erred,—but I feel sure that she rather was sinned against, than sinning! I feel sure that circumstances were against her,—so refined as she was, and papa loving her so! (So particular as poor dear papa is, he never could have loved any one who was not the very essence of refinement.) I can’t help feeling confident, dear Sir John, that as in after life she was led into the sin of changing babies, so she was changed herself, as an infant, with an infant of the name of Gilling. Who that had looked upon her could be-

lieve her to be of humble origin,—a sister of the low-born Gilling? Oh, it is impossible! Only a cruelly-suspicious world could harbour such a base—such a basely preposterous notion! No,—I feel sure that my sweet mamma was a changeling. Of course poor dear papa has never liked to speak of this much, and it was left for me to learn most of that which I have repeated to you from others,—my sister, my governess, my nurse, poor mamma's maid, my aunt Craycroft, who was staying with us at the time that my sister's letter from Darlingster arrived, and who always hated poor mamma. If I have spoken undutifully of my sweet erring mamma, dear Sir John, it is not from want of sympathy with the tempted; it is because I cannot but feel too, too keenly for my poor dear, deserted papa. When I told poor dear papa the terrible fact that I learnt from the miserable Gilling,—ah, you should have seen his face! It was terrible!—a moment never to be forgotten! I almost thought that I should have lost my father,—lost him, just when I most needed a parent's

help and counsel! Besides having felt that my secret was sacred, and might not be breathed even into a loving parent's ear, I had shrunk from discovering to him that which I knew would so sorely grieve and trouble him. But when I knew that the story could no longer be hidden, and that all the world would be talking of it, I felt it best that my dear papa should receive from my lips that which must be told."

The fact was that Alice's great aim had been to keep her purse-proud, bombastic old father from believing the stories which, through herself, had got abroad in the village, throwing doubt on Miles Grantham's heirship to his uncle, Sir John. She knew that whatever his secret hope might be with regard to Miles the future baronet, and heir to a fine property, her father would take good care that she should receive no attentions from Miles Grantham with no particular prospects. She knew that he was ambitious for his daughter, and trembled, as she afterwards said, lest he should "banish from his doors her only love," the only

one whom she could ever bring herself to marry.

“He said very little,” she continued, “but enough to give me to understand that his business in town bore reference to the frightful intelligence that he had received. In short,—he has gone up to see my poor, poor, erring, beautiful mamma ! ”

To say the truth, Alice Craycroft’s “ dear papa ” had gradually discovered life with his only unmarried daughter to be a little dull and tiresome. His mind was for the most part occupied with business affairs, and pleasantly-golden dreams in connection with them. But there were times when he felt the want of something to add a little piquancy and pleasure to the ease and comfort of his home life ; and nothing of this was to be found in the daughter who was his one companion. If he wanted her to converse with him, she sighed as though he had rudely brought her down from the heights of some superior land, to the vulgar haunts in which his mind was wont to take its pastime ; or she answered shortly, gave

herself airs, and turned away to indulge in the romantic reveries over which Miles Grantham was always the presiding genius. She who could be 'winning' enough in her manner with others, hardly spoke to the father from whom everything she possessed came, except to snub him, turn up her nose at his remarks, or grumble on account of something he had done, or would not do. So in ceasing to look upon her in the light of a comfort (or of anything but a somewhat ungrateful and troublesome charge, who if not watched was likely to disgrace him by a runaway-match with some needy adventurer), he had allowed his thoughts to travel back to the early days of his second marriage; and to dwell on his wife as she had appeared to him then,—on the fascinations which had then been his all-absorbing delight. And through his broodings on the one hand, and regretful remembrances on the other hand, he had come to the determination that he would try to effect a reconciliation with her, and get her to return to him to cheer him in his loneliness, and to

help him to manage that undutiful piece of sentimentality his daughter.

It was just as he was about to carry this resolve into execution, that Alice had told him what she had heard from Gilling. It would be hard to express the jar of conflicting emotions with which the old man had received the disgraceful disclosure. The prospect of the pleasure of offering a magnanimous pardon to his wife,—the hope of reviving, in his old age, the indulgence of his past love-dream,—all of a sudden snatched away from him! The shock of this disappointment, the rage, mortification, and astonishment with which he reflected on how thoroughly he had been duped by the woman whom he had made his wife, the disgust with which he discovered that his daughter had long known the secret of her mother's crime, and had kept it hidden from him, allowing him to dream on in ignorance, caring nothing for the pain which she would cause him by the gossiping habits through which she had been the means (as he settled in his own mind) of the matter being

brought to light,—caring, in short, for nothing but her own selfishly-romantic love-dream,—had thrown him completely off his balance, and made him almost beside himself.

“Impertinent and unnatural hussy! raising a whirlwind of unfounded calumnies against the character of her own mother, and daring to bring their tale to him!” Such had been his indignant exclamation, even while he had instinctively felt that the story of the part which his wife had borne in the plot was no unfounded calumny. “Confound” his daughter’s impudence! He would “see her hanged,” he cried, before he would allow her to have another word to say to her sneaking lover, whether or not his newly-acquired “need of a fortune” made him break with his present betrothed. And almost before his numerous invectives were out of his mouth, he was off, and on his way up to town, determined to accuse his wife of her dark doings to her face, to force her to own her guilt, to bring her to justice, —to secure for himself the pleasure of re-

venge, as a substitute for the sweets which he had been promising himself.

But of all this (barring the fact that Mr. Craycroft had gone up to town to see his wife), Sir John of course learnt nothing.

“Thank you, Miss Craycroft,” he returned, presently, when Alice had said her say. “I am extremely sorry” (the tone of quiet satire with which he spoke was lost upon his hearer), —“I am extremely sorry to have caused you so much pain. I need scarcely assure you that whatever steps I may find it needful to take, in order to prove that my son is my son, your feelings and those of your father shall be spared as far as possible. Good-bye. If your father is unable to dine with me to-morrow, I shall call the day following his return, in the hope of finding him at home.” With these words he left her.

The remainder of that day, its morrow and many successive morrows, were passed by Sir John in a state of most excessively impatient patience. He wrote to Mr. Craycroft. He took counsel with his friends Mr. Thomas and Mr. Bowles. He rode over to

Darlingster to renew investigations amongst its old inhabitants; making inquiries respecting the doctor who had sold his practice, and gone across seas, some thirty years previously, and receiving always the same answer,—that no one could give any clue to the whereabouts of the man who was nobody's friend. He called again on Alice Craycroft. He cogitated. He dreamed. He talked and talked again with his startled wife, who was at one moment plaintively distressful over the knowledge that Miles,—her dear Miles!—was no longer to be as a son to her, and the next bubbling over with wondering, half-believed-in joy that she had indeed, in very truth, a real, actual living son of her own! But amidst all his talkings, thinkings, hopes, and fears, it was with the greatest difficulty that he could restrain himself from writing without farther delay, to his son Charles. He did, however, restrain himself. He determinedly kept his resolve not to “disturb the boy,” as he called him, until he was in a position to bring undeniably impartial evidence of that which

was already sure as daylight to himself. He could not make known his claims to the Merediths, he could not bring forward his accusation of Mrs. Grantham and her son, until he could come before both armed to the full with proofs. Then, whether the matter was tried in court or not, the victory would finally be most surely his.

But his patience was destined to undergo a longer trial than he had bargained for. Mr. Craycroft regretted that he was unable to accept his invitation. He called to see him, but he was not at home. A week passed,—ten days passed,—still he had not arrived.

“What could papa be about?” said Alice. He had reported himself to her through an occasional hurried note, and that was all. She could not tell when he would be back.

“How dull the poor dear must be!” condoled her young-lady friends. And Alice, with a plaintive smile, admitted that it was “a little *triste*.” But nevertheless she found no great difficulty in consoling herself for her “dear papa’s” absence.

She had, in fact, consolation of which her friends were ignorant. Considering it judicious to be herself the inflicter of the wound which some hand must inflict on her poor Mr. Grantham, she seized an opportunity, which a letter from Mr. Craycroft, assuring her that he would not be back before a certain day, gave to her, to write a mysteriously urgent invitation to Miles. She entreated him to run down to Darlingster without delay, if only for a few hours, and to allow her ten minutes' conversation with him,—if he could spare so much time to her,—as she had a deeply-important communication to make to him.

Then, most delicately, most tenderly, most sympathizingly, she made known to him the fact so fatal to his prospects in life,—that his mother's secret was out! She made him feel that *she* was feeling, feeling for him, and for him alone. Ah, if she could have had her will!—if the matter could have been altogether hidden!—if he could have been spared the pain!—if she could have borne it for him!—if she could

have done something,—borne something,—to show her deep gratitude for all the brotherly kindness and affection that he had shown towards her !

In fact, she so contrived that, amidst his scowlings, and his stormings, and his fiercely glowing anger, and his loud complaints, and his dull, and apparently hopeless sulki-ness, he should feel the flattery of her adoration to be very sweet to his vanity, and gradually find consolation in the knowledge that if he chose to forsake Margaret, or she chose to forsake him, he might take to his bosom a pretty and bewitching young creature, with the promise of a large fortune into the bargain ! Yes,—the sensation of being beloved by the daughter of a very rich man did come home most consolingly to Miles Grantham, at that moment of his sore discomfiture ! For at that same moment, he was over head and ears in debt. He had gambled away all his money,—had wearied out his mother's patience by his continual demands for remittances and loans,—had imposed upon her, had quar-

relled with her. In short,—just as Alice's revelation, making known to him that he had no longer any right to look upon Sir John almost in the light of a father,—that he had no right “to sponge” upon him now, or to expect a fortune at his death, had fallen,—he and Mrs. Grantham were not on speaking terms. And he had no hope anywhere, but in the very forlorn one that his luck might possibly change. No wonder, then, that, at that emotional moment, his love for Alice burst all bounds, that he forgot all about his devotion to Margaret, and suddenly clasping Alice, the fair heiress, in his arms, told her that she was his, only his, his for evermore!—and that no uncle, no Gilling, no Meredith, no cruel revelation, should rob him of that priceless treasure which he possessed in possessing her sweet heart! Yes,—he possessed her heart! But even now ill-fortune had difficulties to raise for Alice.

Mr. Grantham had taken her by surprise. Papa! what would papa say? Would Mr. Grantham give her time for reflection?

No; Mr. Grantham's feelings were inexorable, and refused to grant hers a moment's law. He was impetuously resolved that she should be his! while secretly telling himself that of course her snobbish old father would thank the stars that had brought to his daughter a chance so fortunate!—that had brought to her a man of family,—a man of fashion, and a man popular amongst his many aristocratic acquaintances!

Alice, however, was by no means so certain that her father would give his consent. “Dear papa was so peculiar!” She “felt assured,” however, that he would “come round in time,”—that he would forgive his daughter,—that his “good heart” would assert itself, and would not, could not, let hers suffer! She was sure he would give his blessing on their marriage, and learn to love Miles fondly as though he had been a first-born son.

Finally, when Miles at length had to tear himself from her arms, the two had arranged a little plot between them, which “dear

papa” was to have nothing to say to, until afterwards,—when all was sure to come right.

Meanwhile, he kept out of the way of Darlingster, but a frequent correspondence was maintained between the lovers; and he had promised, when certain affairs in which he was engaged would allow of it, to pay her another secret visit. And *then!*—ah, *then!*—Alice’s heart beat tumultuously, as hope and fear, “romantic risk,” “romantic adventure,” “trouble and difficulty in the cause of love!” and, finally, blissful and triumphant success, unfolded themselves, one by one, before her eyes, from out of the bosom of that significant “*then!*”

To the delight of this promised secret visit she was still looking forward, when, at length, after more than a fortnight’s absence, a letter came from her father, announcing his intended return on that day.

At length, then, the weary time of suspense was over for Sir John Grantham! At the end of a fortnight his patience had been well-nigh exhausted. He yearned over his son, and had almost determined to delay no

longer writing to inform him of the important discovery that had been made. But his friends had persuaded him to be patient a little longer, and Mr. Thomas had undertaken to write instead of the father,—to write such a letter as he might have written if Charles Grantham had still been Charles Meredith. He wrote, begging for tidings of his friend, and expressing a hope of seeing him soon at Darlingster. The letter had gone, an answer to it was due, and anxiously expected, when at last the news of Mr. Craycroft's return home reached the Hall, and was eagerly welcomed by Sir John.

Yes, Mr. Craycroft had returned, and not alone! The reason of his lengthened absence was soon explained. He had gone in wrathful mood to his wife's house in Tyburnia, had insisted upon seeing her, and had told her point-blank of what she was accused.

Having told her, he stood before her,—this accusing angel from out of the darkness of her past life,—he stood, and waited for her answer.

Overcome, confused, overwhelmed with fears of she knew not what, uncertain, in ignorance, for an instant she remained in silent consideration, and then, all in a moment, she formed her resolution and laid her plans. What was she to gain by denial? Nothing but the result of her husband's revenge. She made no denial. She owned to the whole thing, and yet contrived so to colour her story as to make herself appear a person rather to be pitied than blamed. A person to be pitied, admired, loved, worshipped! This was the sort of person that she made herself appear in the eyes of her husband. For if years had dimmed the lustre of her eyes, and had robbed her complexion of its bloom, they had not deprived her of the art of fascination. She exercised all her old witcheries upon Mr. Craycroft, and very soon had succeeded in making him as much her slave as ever.

In truth, Mr. Craycroft's visit to her had taken place most opportunely. She was beginning to feel her lonely life in Tyburnia a little *ennuyante*. She did not find the

yearly allowance which her husband made her sufficient to enable her to compete with her acquaintances in the way of establishment, dress, and power of keeping open house. She had lost money at cards. Mrs. Grantham had long ceased to send the stipulated sum by which she had bought her services,—and for years past had only returned excuses and promises for importunate demands. Tradesmen were beginning to discover that she was not to be trusted. The people of her “set” began to look askance at her, and to drop her acquaintance; and she was just meditating a retreat to some watering-place, where she might begin life afresh, when this startling visit of her husband brought a hopeful change over the spirit of her dream. The murder was out! The secret of her rise in life had been revealed, and yet she had lost nothing, but rather gained everything. Her husband would take care to shelter her from punishment. She would once more reign supreme over a luxurious establishment. And having learnt from experience, would

take good care not to offend so as to lose her desirable position again. She had returned with him to his home, prepared, under his protection, to make all necessary confessions to Sir John Grantham; and he had promised as soon as possible after this, to take her away from a place so full for her of painful associations.

The confession was made. The story, with all its particulars, was told. Amidst the pleasure she felt in bringing into full relief the measure of infamy that hung about the woman who had been unfaithful to her, Mrs. Craycroft lost all sense of shame in disclosing her own disgraceful conduct. So long as she was safe from punishment, she cared little for what Sir John Grantham and the rest of the world might think or say.

The facts to which she had witnessed were given out to the world; and Mrs. Grantham did not deny their truth. She had no money to throw away on a cause which she was certain to lose; and Sir John, going down to see her, found a miserable, broken-down woman, in ill-health, at war

with her son, with no energy to dispute the matter,—owning to the wicked deed of which she was accused, only asking for a little pity, and for leave to go away to some corner of the earth, where she might hide her head, and be as though she had no existence.

Let her go, and pity and forgiveness go with her, if she would! In his new-found joy, Sir John did not care to look back upon the sorrow of the past years which she had rendered childless for him. It was enough that now he had a son!—that he might write to him, and summon him to Grantham,—that soon,—how soon?—he was beginning to count the days,—that he might soon be looking into his eyes and pressing him to his heart, with an embrace which would be an epitome of all the caresses he would have given to him had he been with him as a child.

Yes,—Sir John had pity for the woman who had wronged him, but he had no pity for Mr. and Mrs. Meredith. He did not realize the pain which the communication he

had to make would cause them. He had almost forgotten their existence! His only remaining uneasiness was the uneasiness which each day's post occasioned, because no letter had arrived by it, from Fribourg! And this uneasiness was each day quickly changed to hope, for it seemed to Sir John that his son must be as eager to embrace his father as he was to embrace his son, and probably would have set out almost on the immediate receipt of his letter, without staying to write to announce the day on which he might be expected to arrive.

"He may be here any day," said Sir John to his wife. "Let his room be got ready,—let everything be ready for him."

Everything was soon in readiness, but the day passed without the looked-for arrival. Perhaps the next morning would bring a letter. No,—there was no letter! It was strange! Once more Sir John was gravely uneasy; but once more he quickly comforted himself, and as he walked about his grounds, and examined shrubs and trees which now had gained a double value in his eyes, he

fell into a pleasingly-romantic reverie,—seeing with his mind's eye a love-scene which was very pleasant to its sight. In his letter he had desired Charles to be the bearer of a message from him to the Willoughbys. He had wished the communication of the wonderful discovery that had been made, to come to them through his son. No doubt, thought the old man, smiling to himself, no doubt Margaret would be “the rascal's” first thought! and the hours would slip away, and he would miss his train and forget to write. That evening he would surely arrive,—that very, very evening! But he did not arrive; and as the days passed on, and still he did not come, and still the post brought nothing from him, Sir John began to grow really and seriously anxious.

Mr. Thomas, receiving no answer, either, to the letter which he had begged might have an early reply, had also written again,—but with no better result. He had then written to Margaret, not giving the news, but asking after Charles Meredith, and

mentioning that he had been expecting to hear from him.

At length there came a letter from Margaret,—a short letter, depressed in tone and utterly unlike herself,—saying that her mother had been ill, telling that Charles Meredith had left Fribourg, that nothing had been heard from him, by any one, and no one knew his address, and concluding with the information that she and her mother hoped shortly to find themselves at home. It was mysterious and unsatisfactory! A thousand miserable fancies flitted through Sir John's brain. Could his son have proposed to Margaret, and have been refused? Could despair have driven him out of his mind? Could he have committed suicide? Could he have died of grief? Could——ah, what dreadful thing might not have happened to him! In his distress Sir John bethought him of the Merediths,—surely they would know the whereabouts of their supposed son. But what was their address? Sir John could scarcely be said to be acquainted with them. It was long since he

had heard anything of them. They had given up their old nominal home, were great travellers, and were seldom fixtures for any length of time in a place. In writing to Charles, he had desired that he would beg Mr. Meredith to communicate with him; but no letter had come, either, from Mr. Meredith.

At last, after much inquiry, he succeeded in obtaining the information that the Merediths, as usual, were on the move; and he was about to chance a letter finding them at the last place where his informer had known them to be, when he received a mystified note of inquiry from Mr. Meredith himself. He and his wife, he said, on their return to England, had heard startling reports with regard to a supposed discovery touching the birth of their son Charles. They begged to know the rights of the story.

Then Sir John wrote the history of the whole affair to them, and adding his present anxiety on his son's account, asked eagerly for tidings of him.

“His son!” The pain with which

Charles' supposed parents learnt that he whom they loved as a son was not their son,—how at first they shut their eyes to proof, and refused belief,—how they gradually became reconciled to the inevitable, consoling themselves with the assurance that no change could deprive them of a life-long affection,—all this, and much besides, must be left to the imagination of those who read this story.

Soon after receiving Sir John Grantham's letter, Mr. and Mrs. Meredith were sympathizing with him in a grief so intense and terrible that all other feelings were swallowed up in it. The grief which he had known thirty years before had returned to him,—but that had been a mere child's-play, a mere baby-grief, compared with this, as a full-grown agony; and they who had been cheated out of grief, and deceived into joy, those thirty years before, now experienced, in its full force, a sorrow which would have fallen upon them, at first, gently, and would have been lulled finally into the peace of a “sure and certain hope.” In answering

Sir John Grantham's inquiry, Mr. Meredith had mentioned that his last account from Charles had been from Chamounix, whence he had sent a hurried note mentioning abruptly that he was about to join in a mountain expedition, with a party of Alpine explorers, whose names he gave. "We have heard nothing since," concluded Mr. Meredith, "and as he promised to write more fully, after the excursion, it is high time for another letter to arrive. In all probability the boy has written, and the letter has missed us, somehow; but it is difficult to avoid feeling a certain amount of uneasiness."

Alas! The *Times* of the day after Sir John had received this letter, proved that there had only been too serious ground for Mr. Meredith's sense of uneasiness. It mentioned that a fatal accident had taken place on one of the mountains at Chamounix, —when four pedestrians had lost their lives. The names of those who had formed the exploring party were given, and in the list of those lost from its ranks appeared the

name of Charles Meredith. A later paper added more particulars, with corrections. The bodies of some of those missing had been found, it said; but Charles Meredith's was one of those which had not yet been discovered. There seemed still, then, to be a faint shadow of hope that he might yet be living! But it was so faint a hope, that the suspense it caused only added poignancy to the strong agony that felt like certainty. This account was again corrected, both in the columns of the *Times*, and in private letters from Charles' friends amongst the Alpine climbers. Several of these letters were received by Mr. Meredith, but no encouragement to hope arrived with them.

It appeared from their story, that the morning appointed for an exploring expedition on the Col de Miage having proved unfavourable, it had been postponed. But later on in the day, the clouds having lifted, four of the disappointed explorers, Charles Meredith amongst the number, had determined to console themselves by making the ascent of the Flégère. They had started,—

in spite of a doubtful sky, and against advice,—and had started without a guide, laughing at warnings, and declaring themselves so familiar with the easy mountain they were about to walk, that even if the predicted mists were to come down upon them, they could not lose their way. The prediction of coming mists had proved too correct. The mountain had presently appeared to the anxious friends of the adventurous party to be completely enveloped in cloud. Anxiety had deepened into alarm, as the afternoon wore away without bringing the return of the pedestrians. Guides had been sent after them, and a strict and active but unsuccessful search had been made. Night had fallen without anything being seen or heard of the adventurers. On the following morning the search had been renewed, and had resulted in the sad discovery of the crushed remains of two of the climbers, who had evidently missed their footing, and fallen over a precipitous part of the mountain, striking heavily against a projecting piece of rock. It was not until after several days

of continued search that another of the unfortunate party had been discovered, lying far away from his companions. The fourth was still missing. And that fourth was Charles Meredith. It was just when the last lingering breath of hope was dying away from the hearts of the parents and friends of Charles Grantham, that Mrs. Willoughby and her daughter had returned to The Cottage. It was immediately after reading another letter, containing a fresh account of failure from Chamounix, that Sir John Grantham had paid his visit to Mrs. Willoughby, and whispered his startling intelligence into her ear.

CHAPTER II.

Lost! Dead! Almost certainly dead! Lost,—through her whim! Dead,—through her fault! Killed,—by her selfishness! Was it possible? Could it—could it—could it be?

Flashing anew, across her mind, from time to time, with terrible sudden pain,—thrilling her through and through, with freshly-awakened, burning, horrible surprise, seeming to sound in her ears continually, as though spoken by some one beyond herself, and yet another self, seeming to be cried out to her from afar, in a voice that was remorsefully and reproachfully despairing,—so came these thoughts to Mrs. Willoughby,—so came to her these thoughts of loss and death,—so came these thoughts of loss and death, through petty, wilful selfishness. “Lost! Dead!” The thoughts came to her as she sat by her

daughter's sick bed, and looked into her thin face, as it lay on the pillow, now in almost deathlike paleness, then unnaturally flushed; or as she touched her burning hand, or listened to her feverishly-irregular breathing and uneasy movements and moanings. They came to her as she listened daily to the doctor's gravely-given opinion, and watched the varying expression of his serious face, and gathered from his manner, almost more than from his words, that any slight change which might have taken place in Margaret's state was rather for the worse than for the better. "Lost! Dead!" The thoughts recurred to her as a message that was double in its meaning of grievously-hopeless punishment. And when at last one day the doctor's face brightened while he spoke of a slight improvement in his patient's symptoms, and saw reason to hope that she had really taken a turn for the better, even amidst the immensity of her thankfulness and relief, the bitter, bitter sense of that loss and death which her own selfishness had brought about, pressed sharply

upon her heart, and reminded her that though her daughter might recover her health, she could never know the joy she might have known.

“She certainly is better,” said Mr. Thomas, cheerfully, when he came to see Margaret the following morning.

And Mrs. Willoughby’s heart leapt up gladly at the words, and then sank again in answer to those spoken in the haunting voice that was for ever crying out, and forcing her to listen to its cry of, “Lost! Dead! Lost! Dead!”

“She is going on well. The improvement is steady, though slow,” said Mr. Thomas, when a few days more had gone by.

“Thank God! Thank God!” Ah, the rush of loving joyful praise with which the words of thanksgiving burst from Mrs. Willoughby’s heart!

“Lost! Dead!” Ah, the bitter anguish of the after-cry which ascended from the depths of her spirit, and overthrew her gladness with its misery!

After a few more days, Margaret was well enough to be moved to her sofa. It was still autumn weather, peculiarly mild for the time of year, and as lovely as sunshine and a soft blue sky studded with small gold-tinted clouds could make it. The invalid was soon strong enough to enjoy sitting in an easy chair by the window, looking at the smooth slopes of green lawn, trees rich in their many shades of autumn colouring, and the wilder wooded ups and downs beyond. How beautiful it all was!—how beautiful for all who looked at it! But with what a wonderful dream of extraordinary beauty it was overlaid, for the sight of the invalid, while she lay, not thinking about it, scarcely conscious that she was feeling it, only aware of certain exultant sensations which told of the presence of new-coming life! The robin redbreast,—as it sang near her window, flew out of sight, came back and sang again,—seemed to give living expression to those feelings of hers, which were too deep to be clothed in thought, which oppressed her, in her weakness, by the very intensity of

their sweetness,—the sweetness of a new-found life. It was to her no ‘messenger of calm decay,’ but a messenger of Immortal Life,—Immortal Love,—and the song which made the thankful tears well up to her eyes, was, for her, the song of victory over death. It was a long dream of death that she had been dreaming, and now the Angel of Life had awakened her! And, ah, how delightful it was to be alive again!—to be getting well!—to be looking at the earth which had grown doubly beautiful during her death-trance!—to know that she would soon be free, out walking about again, amidst the trees and flowers, going to see people, helping them, letting them feel all her gratitude and love,—above all, doing a thousand things for her mother, who had been slaving herself for her! Sensation had passed into reverie, and reverie was now passing into active thought, which was very sweet in its quick and easy flow, amidst a crowd of loving memories and tender hopes. Why had the world seemed so black to her, just before she was taken ill? she wondered.

It must surely have been that ill-health had made her morbid, and had thrown a veil of exaggerated blackness over her troubles. Of course she might have known that her mother would come round as soon as she understood, and now she had come round,—and all, of course, must come right. Even if Charles Meredith had not yet returned to Fribourg,—had not yet received the letters sent to him,—there were a thousand ways of finding him out, of letting him know that only a series of mistakes was keeping him separated from her,—of making him aware that now he might return to her whom he loved so well. Besides,—to know that he did love her, and that she might love him, was surely enough to make the whole earth look beautiful,—to fill her life with a spirit of beauty and delight. How blind and ungrateful she must have been ! How little she must have trusted the good Father in Whom the foundations of all love dwelt !—in Whom all true love must live and be blest ! Surely such love, a love which came from Him, must

have power to bring her beloved one near to her! Thus she thought; and then her mind passed back to thoughts and memories of Charles, through which she began indeed to feel that he was not absent, that his spirit was with her very really, by dint of the mighty power of the love by which he loved her. Yes,—he was with her! She felt that he was with her! and the sense of his presence grew stronger and more lasting, as the days passed on, and brought her a step farther on the road to recovery.

It was a beautiful life that she was living, during those days of quietness and weakness, but occasionally a slight touch of uneasiness crept into it, to disturb its peaceful security. Why did her mother never say a word to her about Charles Meredith? she sometimes wondered. Why did Mr. Thomas never mention him? At first they might have been afraid of agitating her, but she was well enough now to talk of the things she cared about. Why did they not speak of him?

The silence began to be oppressive to her,

and yet she dared not be the first to break it. She shrank from speaking of him, after all that had happened, for fear—for fear—for fear of she knew not what; only her heart failed her somehow, whenever she thought of questioning her mother, and it seemed to her that to begin to speak of him of her own accord, would be like breaking, rudely and abruptly, the sacred silence of some holy place. Then again, it troubled her to see her mother looking so grave,—so strangely, horribly sorrowful,—with such a set look upon her face! Not that it was always so. When she came near to her, brought her flowers, told her what she had been doing in the village,—whom she had seen,—or sat by her side to read to her, her face was sweet and tender, and often full of smiles,—much brighter than it had ordinarily been in former days. But when she caught sight of it, unawares, when Mrs. Willoughby did not know that she was being looked at, then it was that the painful shadow rested on her face,—then was to be seen that startled, sad expression

about the eyes, that peculiar, stern, hopeless look about the lines of the mouth,—so new, so different from the appearance of querulous invalidism that the countenance had worn in former times, that Margaret wondered and trembled, as her eyes followed her mother about the room. For a while it had seemed all natural that she should be looking grave. Of course she was anxious. Of course anxiety had told upon her. But now that her child was getting well, it was most unnatural,—most strange and ominous!

“What can it mean?” asked Margaret of herself, one grey November morning, when she was feeling her weakness peculiarly, and all things about her seemed to be looking sorrowful.

Then while she lay quietly pondering, an idea struck her. “Can it be,” she thought, “that she fancies that I am still fretting because of what she did about the letter?—that I am still vexed?—vexed with her! Dear, sweet mother!”

The tears came into her eyes as the thought forced itself upon her mind, and

she determined that, for her mother's sake, she would do violence to her feelings, and be the first to break the silence.

While she made her resolution, her mother, who had lately left the room, re-entered it, with some China roses and late Michaelmas daises, mixed with crimson, green and rose-coloured leaves. Her face looked bright and gentle, as she stooped to kiss her child, and put the nosegay into her hand.

“Oh, mother, how lovely and how sweet!” cried Margaret. “I don't know why, but they seem to remind me of Fribourg, and they bring with them a sort of scent of that old hanging-garden at the back of the Zähringer Hof.”

All in a moment her mother's pale face was flushed with deep red, and before she could turn away her head, Margaret's quick glance had caught the grieved, stern, frightened expression of countenance, which she had learnt to know so well. She was hastening towards the door, murmuring something about having visits to pay in the village, but Margaret called her back.

“Mother!” she cried, wistfully.

And when Mrs. Willoughby quickly returned to the sofa on which her daughter was resting, her face was tender and gentle again, and in a moment she was smiling brightly.

Well, what is it, my dear child?” she asked, quickly; “make haste and tell me, for I must be off, unless you want me.”

“I do want you, mother. I want to say something to you. Could you not write? Could not Mr. Thomas write again to him? Cannot something be done? He must have returned to Fribourg by this time?”

A moment ago,—even amidst her anxieties, even while she questioned inwardly, and resolved to speak,—to see that efforts were made,—a moment ago, she had seemed to feel the sweetness of his presence. Life for his sake had seemed beautiful and precious. But now, the struggling with trouble that came suddenly into her mother’s face, was answered by the trouble and storm of her own heart. And too weak physically to control excitement once yielded to,—

“Mother,” she went on, hastily and petulantly, “Why don’t you speak? Why don’t you say that you will write?—that something shall be done?—that—that.”

“Hush, hush, my dear child,—hush!” struck in Mrs. Willoughby, alarmed. Her face changed as she spoke. For the intensity of her pain grew too unutterably loving for bitterness; but it was there!—she felt that it was there,—she felt that it was seen and felt by her child,—that it must influence her child,—that it must tell a tale,—that it must carry its burden to the heart of her for whom she would willingly die!—die! would willingly suffer the very worst of torments! She felt, she felt most bitterly, that her strong mother’s love was powerless to shield her child from the pain which she herself had created for her.

“‘Hush?’” echoed Margaret. “Mother, what is the use of saying ‘hush’? Why can’t you tell me that something shall be done?—that you will try to find him out,—to undo all the mischief and make it right?”

“Dear,—it has been done,—he has been written to,—but—but— Perhaps a letter may have come to-day. I will go to the Hall. I will go and see.” She tried to speak cheerfully, naturally; she tried to put on a hopeful smile, and to find true words which might soothe and comfort her child.

But her clumsy attempts failed, and Margaret saw only the grieved, pained, grave and fearful expression about the eyes and mouth.

“Stop a moment, mother,” she said; “tell me more. Have they written? Have they written more than once? Have they tried to find him and failed?”

“Failed, so far, but every day, we hope, may——”

“Then if you hope, mother, why do you always have that look upon your face?” cried Margaret. “Why do you always look as if you were seeing the shadow of death?”

“Lost! Dead!” shrieked out that voice from afar, in Mrs. Willoughby’s ear. “Lost! Dead!” throbbed her heart in reply.

“What is the real truth? What does it all mean?” continued Margaret.

“It means, as I have told you,” replied Mrs. Willoughby, “that we are doing our best to find him, and that every day we hope——”

“Against hope,” put in Margaret, in bitter accents.

“And it means, oh Margaret, that I am utterly and entirely miserable because of this agony,—this suspense,—that I have caused you,—but that I would bear a thousand worlds full of misery more, if that were possible, to spare you the least touch of what you are bearing now.”

Bearing? What was it that she was bearing? Was she bearing it, or was it bearing her?

There was silence, while the strong and mighty grief had its way with her,—drawing her down with its violence,—drawing, it would almost have seemed, for a minute, the spirit away from the flesh, and bringing it back again, with a sharp touch of inexpressible anguish. There was silence still, while the storm was working inwardly, and Mrs. Willoughby looking on, saw Margaret's

face pass from a stillness which was almost like the stillness of death, to the quivering and trembling which told what was being suffered by her child. There was silence, while the mother looked on, and felt, through the power of her love, what her child was suffering,—and knew that she could do nothing to help her, in that which but for her need never have been. Silence ! Would that bitter silence ever end ?

It was broken at last, by Margaret. Just touching her mother's hand, with the gentlest possible touch, and turning upon her, with the faintest shadow of a most tenderly-pathetic smile, "Poor mother," she said, "it will be worse for you than for any of us. For him it is all right now. And for me,—it is not as if I had a long strong life before me. I see now,—I understand now, the meaning of things ! You must be comforted, mother."

How weak her voice had become ! How wonderfully sweet and tender the sad tones were in which she spoke the words that were so sorrowful in their would-be consolation !

A terrible new fear thrilled through Mrs. Willoughby's heart. But forcing down all her own personal more immediate feelings of grief and fear, she stooped down over her daughter, and whispered,—

“But darling, I am hoping and praying still, that all may be right on earth for you and him.”

Margaret looked up quickly.

“You have explained nothing yet,” she said, in a different tone. “Have you anything better to tell?”

“I mean,” answered Mrs. Willoughby, evasively, “that I do not think that you need give up hoping yet. I dare not agitate you by talking more about it now. You must lie still and try to go to sleep, and I shall go and look for Mr. Thomas, and ask him to come to you, and tell you all there is to tell.”

Then Mrs. Willoughby left her; and Margaret, in spite of her parting words, made sure that she knew the worst, and that all hope of earthly happiness was over for her for ever.

CHAPTER III.

MR. THOMAS was not at home when Mrs. Willoughby went in search of him. When he called the next day, Margaret was alone. He found her weaker, but there was no return of fever, and she was in no way otherwise worse.

“What have you been doing to yourself?” he said, laughingly, by-and-by. “We must try to get you out of doors, the first fine day, or we shall have you clinging to the walls of your prison-house, and refusing to be torn away from them.

“But she answered him with none of her usual brightness, and there was such a sad look of inquiry in the eyes that she turned on him, and her pale face was so pathetically sorrowful, that he paused for a moment to regard her with wondering anxiety.

“Mamma says that you can tell me about it,” she said, abruptly. “I know that there is no hope, and I am not going to ask you to give me any; but I want to know all particulars, so that I may face the worst, and realise it better.”

“‘The worst?’ ‘No hope?’” cried Mr. Thomas, thrown off his guard, and speaking with hasty impatience. “Who has dared to trouble you with hopes, and fears, and bothers, while you are under my orders of perfect quiet? It would have been time enough to bring anxieties down upon you when you had got a little stronger.”

“I asked mamma a question,” replied Margaret, quietly. “She tried to make me think that there was hope; but I know that she has no hope herself, and that you none of you have any. And please, I would rather know everything at once.”

Then Mr. Thomas, gradually and gently, broke to her the worst, concluding cheerily, by bidding her hope on bravely even yet, and to put a will into getting well, for the sake of her mother and the many friends

who loved her. But he left her with a heavy heart; for he saw that he had left no hope behind him, and he believed her to be just in that state, physically, in which the loss of the stimulus of hope must materially lessen the chances of recovery. He had not included in his revelation, Sir John Grantham's newly-discovered interest in Charles, fearing to add farther agitation to her grief. But he had a faint expectation that when she had become a little more accustomed to the thought of her loss, the knowledge that her old friend shared her grief, and needed from her a *daughter's* sympathy, might act as an inducement to her to try to live.

“The wish to comfort him for his son's sake may be useful, by-and-by,” he said to Mrs. Willoughby, afterwards; “but I could wish to see her a little stronger before running the risk of causing her mind farther disturbance.”

“Oh, it would be too dreadful for her,—the feeling of all that might have been!” returned Mrs. Willoughby, with a sort of

shudder. "I will go in to her now. Good-bye, and thank you."

"Mother," said Margaret, when her mother was seated by her side, "Mr. Thomas has told me all. It seems to me almost as if he had been telling me himself, all this time!—as if he had been telling me, not of his death, but of his continued life,—as if he had been preparing me in this way to bear the sorrow that he knew was coming to me."

"But darling," returned Mrs. Willoughby, in the calmly-sorrowful voice of one who had put all self-interest away from her, as a thing to which she had forfeited all right,—“but darling, until there is certain proof of his death, surely you need not give up all hope of earthly happiness!”

"Have *you* any hope, mother? Are you not all as sure as if you had had more decided proof of his death, that we may never hope to see him on earth again? To me, it seems so strange that I have not understood what he has been saying to me all along, until now! I might have known that he

was with me, that it was his dear presence that was making me feel so glad and peaceful when I thought of him. I fancied, before, that it was only that his spirit was reaching out to me from afar,—that his love was making itself felt. But now I know that his actual presence has been with me, and nothing can make me doubt it any more.”

There was silence then for a time, while Mrs. Willoughby tried, amidst her own misery, to be thankful that her child could feel a touch of human consolation in her grief. Presently Margaret spoke again.

“It makes it much easier for me,” she said. “It is so kind of God to have let it come in this sort of way!—so kind for both of us! Oh, mother, think how dreadful it would have been if he had come home and found me dead! Now,—it will soon be better for both of us than it could have been if all had gone happily for us on earth!”

“But, my dear child, in case—in case—won’t you, for his sake, wish—try—ought you not, even—” With quivering lips, Mrs. Willoughby thus spoke and hesitated.

“Do I not intend to try to get well, for *right*'s sake, you mean?” said Margaret, in a tone of surprised inquiry. “Of course, mother dear, I shall not give up doing all that I am told! Of course, too, I shall do my best to get well, for your sake, putting the *ought* out of the question.”

But to herself she added,—

“It will be of no use, though, for I am doomed to die. I feel that I am really sinking. It was only the thought and fancy about him that made it seem to me as if I was getting stronger.” Then, while a sudden pain shot through her heart, “Ought I to *wish* to get well?—ought I to pray for it, I wonder?” she thought.

For a few minutes she remained silent, while her mother, musing bitterly on the sad alternatives in prospect, her child's death, or her child's saddened life, watched the troubling of her face.

At last, looking up quickly,

“I know I am horribly selfish, mother darling,” she said, “but—I knew you were grieving about me, and you are so dear and

unselfish, that I felt you would be glad to hear of the things that make it easier for me to bear it. Besides, the same things will make it easier for you. You will not think of us as dead and away from you," she added, imploringly, "will you, sweet, dear mother? You will think of us as alive and with you, and will feel us loving you?"

"Oh, my darling!" sobbed Mrs. Willoughby, unable longer to control herself,—
"my darling, must it be? Have I killed both of you?"

Then, after giving her a hurried, passionate kiss, she quickly left the room, that she might not farther trouble her child, by the agitation which would have its way.

CHAPTER IV.

“MOTHER, I think I am better,—perhaps I am going to get well, after all! I feel quite strong to-day.”

Margaret looked up with a sweet bright smile, as she spoke; but her voice was very feeble, and the exertion of her quick speaking made her cheeks flush, and left her very faint and breathless.

For weeks she had been gradually losing ground,—daily getting thinner and weaker,—finding herself less able to exert herself, each day; until even the power of swallowing nourishment seemed to be passing away from her.

All efforts had been made. The best medical advice in London had been sought. Everything was being done that could be done. But although no positive disease,—

beyond that of simple weakness,—had as yet become apparent, although Mr. Thomas still could not say that there was any actual reason why she should not recover, if only some means of restoring her strength could be found, he had already, in his own mind, almost given up the case as a hopeless one. He had already made Mrs. Willoughby feel that if she continued to hope, it was a state of hoping against hope, which must surely end in grievous disappointment. For what more could be done than had been done? If by any extraordinary chance it were to be discovered that there was real cause for belief that Charles Grantham was yet alive,—it was within the verge of possibility that, far gone though she was, the revulsion of feeling, the renewed earthly hope, might act upon her weakened frame as a restorative,—might be the means of beginning a cure. But the most sanguine had at length parted with the faith to which they had long obstinately clung, that such a discovery might yet be made. So that the only ground of hope for Margaret's recovery had now passed away.

Nevertheless, the last day or two had brought with them an apparent change for the better in the invalid. She had brightened up wonderfully, and a strange desire for recovery had suddenly sprung up in her. As she lay in her weakness on the sofa, warmly wrapped up, and looking out on the beauty of an exhilarating December day, with tokens of her mother's tenderness all around her,—feeling her mother's love, realizing that she was already living with those in the life unseen,—living with her best beloved,—as she lay half thinking, half dreaming, of all fair and beautiful and tender things,—the vision of a longer life on earth had suddenly become very sweet to her. To be working earnestly, as he had worked, in the power of love, in fellowship with her unseen dearest companion,—doing good, taking trouble, forgetful of self, bearing in patience pain and sorrow,—how blessed it would be! How could she have been so quietly resigning herself to the thought of death?—so forgetful of the grief which she would cause her mother by dying? How selfish and self-

indulgent she had been ! No, she must not allow herself to sink down into death,—she must *determine* to live ! For it must be God's will that she should live, as long as *she could* ! Then had followed sweet efforts, and sad failures ! And now another brilliant morning had found her in the same mood,—excited, anxious for life, determined to get well !

“I feel quite strong to-day,” she said again, while her mother, clinging eagerly to the hope held out to her, stood by, watching while she made painful efforts to eat a mouthful or two of the food with which she was trying to tempt her appetite, and then with heart-sinkings saw her put down the spoon, and fall back, faint and exhausted by the effort.

“I shall be hungry soon, but just now it seems as if it would choke me,” she returned, in answer to her mother's pleadings ; “and I want to talk to you as soon as I have rested, of all that I mean to do when I am well again.”

“Looking quite bright to-day !” said Mr.

Thomas, when he came by-and-by to see her; but he could not tell Mrs. Willoughby that he had found any real increase of strength, or any reason to hope for improvement. "She is feverishly excited," he went on, "and is wearing herself out with her eager fancies and thoughts. It is just possible that if she is kept perfectly quiet, and can be got to eat a little more, that the newly-awakened desire to live may tell in her favour."

In the course of the afternoon, Alice Craycroft called.

"Oh, let her come up," said Margaret.

"My dear child, Mr. Thomas wants you to keep perfectly quiet. I think you had better not see anyone to-day," answered her mother.

"But I am so much better," said Margaret, in a tone of surprise, and becoming excited all in a moment. "Besides, surely there is nothing very disquieting in seeing Alice!"

"But you are tired?"

"Not half so tired as I have been other days, and I somehow want to see her to-day. Please let me?"

She was so weak that when agitation was once set going, it was no easy matter for her to control it, even a little, and Mrs. Willoughby,—inwardly anathematizing Alice for having turned up so inopportunately, and still more herself for having forgotten to give orders that no one was to be admitted,—thought the excitement of being thwarted would be the worst of two evils for her, and let her have her way.

The two girls had been play-fellows as children, and though they were not kindred spirits, or devoted friends, they had continued to some extent intimate acquaintances, and Margaret had always taken a kindly interest in Alice.

“And you know you really ought to go out, mother,” said Margaret.

“Which means that you want a *tête-à-tête* with Alice, I suppose,” returned her mother, smiling.

“Of course,—and it will tire me much less, especially as Alice will do the principal part of the talking.”

“Don’t let her keep you too long, and

don't let her excite herself," said Mrs. Willoughby to Alice; and then, sad and anxious, and yet with a gleam of something like hope flitting now and again through her heart, she left the two girls together, and went on her way.

When she returned to Margaret she found her with brilliantly-flushed cheeks, and with a beautiful expression, that was half amused and half tender, on her face.

"Oh, mother, what do you think?" she said, excitedly. "I am delighted beyond measure at a discovery that I have made! Alice, of course, was mysterious as usual, but she managed to let me see that she is as good as engaged to Miles Grantham. I don't know what Sir John will say to it! I am sorry for him, for he had always a strong objection to poor Alice. But he is hard upon her, and after all she is a great deal too good for Miles. I shall really begin to think, though, that there is a touch of something genuine somewhere about Miles' composition, if he sticks honestly to this——"

“But my dear child,” broke in Mrs. Willoughby, “I wish you would be quiet now, and try to go to sleep. You are tired out.”

“Tired? Indeed Alice has quite refreshed me. This news has done me a world of good. It seems to have taken an ugly blot out of my life,” and then she leaned back, and lay still, with a sweet look of satisfaction on her bright face. But soon, “I always said that he *should* do it, you know, mother!” she added, with a quiet laugh. “Poor Alice! It does seem too ridiculous to think of any one making a hero out of such a creature as he is! Still, I cannot help being very glad! Alice was mysterious, too, about her mother. I wonder if there really is a mystery!—anything beyond that quarrel and reconciliation you told me about. Alice always likes to make out that it is only by an accident that she and her belongings have tumbled out of one of her favourite novels into actual life!”

“Yes; but, my dear, do leave off talking!”

“Very well, mother, but indeed I am not tired.”

“Yes you are, only you are too much excited to feel it.”

After this, Margaret lay silently obedient, trying to rest, until the dinner-bell rang, when her mother left her, that she might send up something for her to eat.

“Is Jane out, Elizabeth?” asked Margaret, of the unusual maid, who brought in the tray.

“Yes, miss,” answered Elizabeth, in a tone of severity, and with a curious look on her face which attracted Margaret’s notice.

“Is anything the matter, Elizabeth?” she asked.

“I wasn’t to say nothing about it, miss, but as you asks me, I must say as there’s enough the matter,—a good place, and all, and been trusted and petted, and made so much of.”

“Never mind, Elizabeth. Don’t talk of it, if you have been told not,” said Margaret, quickly. But as Elizabeth left the room a choking sensation came into her throat, and

she burst out sobbing like a child who has lost its nurse.

Jane had been a kind sick nurse to her, and she had learnt to trust her, and to cling to her, forgetting her former rude and bad conduct. And now, what could have happened? What could have taken her away? She could not bear the thought that perhaps she was to see her no more.

“Mother, what is all this about Jane?” she said, by-and-by, when her mother was with her again.

“She is out this evening,” answered Mrs. Willoughby.

“But I was afraid, from what Elizabeth said, that something was wrong, mother?”

“What did Elizabeth say?”

“She said,” began Margaret,—then abruptly breaking off, “Oh, mother!” she cried, with a sob in her voice, “Jane has not gone away, has she?”

“Elizabeth was told to say nothing to you on the subject,” said Mrs. Willoughby, in a provoked tone. “Jane has behaved very badly. I will tell you more another

time, darling. But I want you not to trouble yourself by thinking of it to-night. Perhaps you won't take it to heart so much when I can tell you everything."

The invalid asked no more questions, but the loss of her nurse at the moment seemed to her a very great one,—and every now and then a fresh sob came, while she lay still, feeling very sore and sad.

"Now, darling, we must get you into bed," said Mrs. Willoughby, presently. "You are tired out. You must put up with me as your maid, to-night."

"Oh, mother dear, Elizabeth will do quite well. I am not quite such a baby as all that. Only—only—Jane seemed so kind and gentle to me, and I hoped she was really good, and that I had been mistaken in her before,—and I can't bear to think that it is not so."

However, Mrs. Willoughby determined not to trust Elizabeth again, and as soon as she had settled her daughter in bed, she left her with the promise that she would look in again shortly, and with the hope that she

would soon sob herself to sleep, and would awaken rested in the morning.

But while she was gone, Elizabeth came in with something which it had been usual for Jane to bring up.

“Can I get you anything, Miss Margaret?” she asked, going to the bed-side, and looking down upon Margaret’s tear-stained face. “A little camphor julep’s comforting if any one is in trouble, miss. I don’t wonder that you should take on. Sad thing that a young lady like that should run away to be married. Lor, miss! I did not mean to frighten you.”

For Margaret had moved with a sudden start, her breath coming quickly at Elizabeth’s sudden announcement, which had seemed to fall upon her like a shock, into the midst of a sad, half-waking dream, and then itself to form part of her dream-like existence. She said nothing, but lay gazing with frightened eyes into Elizabeth’s face.

“I did not know you was only just awake, miss. I thought you was just crying a bit about Miss Craycroft,” went on Elizabeth.

“ Miss Craycroft ? ” cried Margaret, wonderingly.

“ Yes, miss. Did not your mamma tell you about it ? I made sure that you knew. Seems sad,—her having just been in to see you before, and keeping it all in so cunning,—just like Jane!—and such friends as you’ve always been, and Mr. Miles so familiar and all. Any one would have thought that a fine young lady like that, with her father so rich, would have had a grand wedding at home.”

“ I don’t know what you are talking about, Elizabeth. What has Miss Craycroft to do with Jane ? ” returned Margaret. She began to have some inkling as to what had happened, but, as yet, could not, would not, take the matter in.

“ Lor, miss, we never dared to interfere, knowing what a value missis put upon Jane ; but she’ve been at miss Craycroft’s beck and call nobody knows how long. I caught her getting hold of letters, which I knew was out of your pockets, miss, and I come upon her with the young lady, and I knew

as something was going on then. That was ever so long ago. A deal of gossip that went on in the village, Miss Craycroft and Jane was at the bottom of. But Jane had two games to play, as one may say. She wanted to keep right with missis, and missis wanted Mr. Miles for you, you know, miss,—you'll excuse me, miss, for speaking so freely,"—continued the housemaid, who was an old servant and had known Margaret from early childhood.

But Margaret interrupted her to say,—

"I have let you go on too long, Elizabeth. Mamma did not want me to hear anything about it to night. It seems so dreadful, I can hardly believe it."

There was no need for Elizabeth to tell her that Jane had been bribed by Miss Craycroft to help her in her flight from home. The whole matter was clear enough to her now.

"I hope I have not done any mischief, and shan't have disturbed you, and given you a bad night, Miss Margaret," said Elizabeth, frightened, now that her clever piece of work was done.

“ Oh no, thank you, Elizabeth; it does not matter,” said Margaret. “ Good night. I must go to sleep, before mamma comes back.”

But when Mrs. Willoughby returned to her, she was lying with wide-open startled eyes,—her sobs were gone, and so was all chance of restful sleep for the night !

It was a night full of troubled thought, and fitful momentary nightmare. All the grief of her past life came over her, mingling with the sensations left by more immediate and lesser shocks and trials. All the peace and hope which had lately crept into her heart had vanished. And the next day found her thoroughly worn out,—suffering the exhaustion of re-action after the previous day’s excitement.

And now, once more, the days, as they went on, seemed to find her one weaker than the last.

“ Mother, darling,” she said, one day, “ I did so try to live ! I did so *want* to get well, but now it makes me tired to think about it. I think I should be always tired,

and only a worry to you. I think it will be better for me to die. I think it must come! Please forgive me for it, darling sweet mother? I am so tired, and it will be so beautiful, and I shall love and bless you so!"

Must it be? Must it really be?

Mr. Thomas came every day, and suggested every new restorative that he could think of; but nothing did any real good; and shaking his head sadly, he told Mrs. Willoughby that the end was only a question of days. Yet all the organs of his patient were apparently still sound. It was simply, he said, a gradual loss of power,—a gradual decline and wasting away,—a gradual loss of vitality.

"We have tried everything," was his response, when pressed and questioned once again by Mrs. Willoughby. "If it would be any satisfaction to you to have still farther advice, I will consult with any fresh London physician you like; but I fear nothing now can save her. She is sinking slowly but surely. I do not think that she can last many more days."

Could nothing save her? Ah, there was one thing,—hopeless as her recovery,—one thing that, if it were not an impossibility, might even yet, Mrs. Willoughby thought,—might even yet be the means of bringing fresh life to her darling.

“If—if only,” she said, in her heart, and the agony of her despairing thought became a prayer,—“if only the impossible could become the possible,—if only Charles Grantham could be discovered to be alive, his life on earth would surely bring new life to Margaret!”

Ah, for what was she praying, in her blindness? Had she never heard of death from a sudden unprepared-for joy? Had Margaret power enough left to regain vitality from this newly-restored life from without, for which she had prayed and wrestled? Would it not be better, more blessed, that the tender spirit should sink to rise into the fulness of its life immortal,—where she would find close union with him to whom she was united already, by the bonds of eternal love?

CHAPTER V.

“OH, mother dear, I don’t think I can get up to day,” said Margaret, feebly, as, after raising herself with difficulty from her pillows, she sank back again, exhausted by the effort. It was the day after that hopeless conversation of Mrs. Willoughby’s about her darling, with Mr. Thomas, which had been followed by that passionate prayer which had seemed as if it was loaded with a power strong enough to remove the mountain even of her despair. Now she was standing by the bed-side, looking on, with heart sinking, at the white emaciated face of the sick girl, and the poor thin, thin little arm and hand that lay, helpless as death, outstretched on the cover-lid beside her. And she was believing in no power but a power to do all that was needful for the dying

girl's comfort. She was hoping for nothing but strength that would enable her to bear the inevitable, and to forget her own heart suffering in her endeavours to soothe and support her darling.

"Well, then, dear, suppose you wait a little longer," she said. "Perhaps by-and-by you may feel more rested. Mr. Thomas thinks it better for you to get up for a little while, if possible, you know. But I dare say he will be here soon, and we shall hear what he thinks about it to-day."

Then Margaret lay very still for a few moments, at the end of which, with a restless movement,

"Oh, mother," she said, "I think, after all, I should like to get up. I think I should breathe better. There is such a stifling feeling about the day. I feel as if something dreadful was going to happen to me."

"It is only that you are faint, darling," said Mrs. Willoughby, supporting her with one hand, while she put *eau-de-cologne* on her forehead with the other. "I will ring the bell for Allnutt, and ask if there is another

bottle of the reviving medicine. And then we will see about moving you to the sofa.”

When Allnutt, the maid who had replaced Jane, answered the bell, she brought in a note with her.

“It came some time ago, ma’am,” she said. “Dillon gave it to me and I put it on the table in your room. I thought you would have found it there.”

“Oh, it is of no consequence,” returned Mrs. Willoughby, taking it absently, while she gave her orders to the maid. And she was about to put it down without looking at it, when, the address catching her eye, she changed her mind, and quickly opening the envelope, read as follows,—

“MY DEAR MRS. WILLOUGHBY,—

“I have made arrangements for a consultation with a medical man who happens to have turned up in this neighbourhood. He is an old friend of mine, and a very clever fellow. I have great confidence in his abilities and judgment. I do not know whether I shall bring him to see your

daughter to-day, or to-morrow ; but he will probably call with me, when I look in at The Cottage, in the course of the morning.

“ Yours sincerely,

BENJAMIN THOMAS.

Just as she finished reading it, there came a ring at the door bell.

“ Oh, this will be Mr. Thomas, I suppose,” said Mrs. Willoughby. “ That is all right.”

But when Allnutt returned with the medicine, she brought word that Sir John Grantham was the visitor.

“ Oh, I can’t see him,” said Mrs. Willoughby, quickly. “ You must tell Dillon to say that I am engaged with Miss Margaret, Allnutt.

However, Allnutt soon came back, saying, “ Sir John Grantham wishes to see you very particularly, ma’am. He says he will wait.”

“ Very well ; I will come down presently,” returned her mistress. “ Miss Margaret would like to get up, Allnutt, now.”

And after adding some more orders, she

told the maid that she would herself help the invalid to dress, and would ring the bell when she was ready to be moved to the sofa.

It was some time before the fatiguing process of partial dressing was over; and it was not until she had seen her daughter comfortably settled on her soft sofa, and beginning a little to recover from the effects of her exhausting efforts, that Mrs. Willoughby left her, to join Sir John Grantham in the drawing-room.

“Good-bye, I don’t mean to let him keep me long,” she said, turning round for a last glance at the dear face, which she was fearing to lose altogether from her sight. “Good-bye, darling!”

She was half way down-stairs, when once more the door-bell rang.

“This will be Mr. Thomas, I suppose; I wonder if he has come alone!” she said to herself, pausing for a moment, on the staircase. Yes,—there was his voice! And she hurried down-stairs, prepared to waylay him in the hall, and bring him up to Margaret’s room.

She had reached the oak-flooring at the foot of the stairs, and was proceeding to cross the hall, when her eyes encountered,—not Mr. Thomas, whom she had expected to meet, but,—the ghost, as it seemed to her, of Dr. Carl! “The Dr. Carl who had attended her at Fribourg!”—this was the thought that, in that moment of amazement, flitted hurriedly through her confused memory,—not “Charles Meredith!” or,—“Charles Grantham! Is it himself,—alive,—or is it an apparition?” But—“Dr. Carl! The Dr. Carl who had attended her at Fribourg! Was it his spirit come to save her child?”

And then,—what meant the rush of blood to and from her heart? What meant the medley of fresh fancies, thoughts and feelings, that came overpoweringly through and about her? What was happening to her? Whither was she going?

She had fainted away; and Dr. Carl,—no mere shadow of him, no mere apparition,—Dr. Carl, changed indeed, thinner, paler,—without the look of vigour which had been

his when he had attended her at Fribourg, —but yet most actually Dr. Carl, Charles Meredith, Charles Grantham, was supporting her! while Mr. Thomas, his companion, was giving orders for water, *sal-volatile*, and all the requisite remedies.

The clatter and rush of unavoidable sounds roused Margaret, whose room door had been left a little ajar, out of a semi-conscious doze into which she had fallen.

“Mother, Sir John’s voice sounded like Dr. Carl’s,” she said, suddenly, in a soft sighing manner, while the colour came quickly into her face.

“Your mamma is gone down to the drawing-room, to see Sir John Grantham, miss,” answered Allnutt.

“Oh, yes, I forgot,” said Margaret, closing her eyes with a weary sigh; and then opening them again, moving restlessly, and glancing towards the door, “When will she be back, I wonder?” she added. “It seems a long time!”

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. WILLOUGHBY had been carried on to the sofa in the drawing-room. It seemed to her, as she came to herself, that she had been for a prolonged journey through some dreadful world, into which she had been drawn by the avenging angel of her selfish deeds. But when she looked up, in her newly returned consciousness, he in whose form this angel of wrath had appeared was gazing down at her with a face expressing strong tenderness and pity. Perhaps, however, the shadow of some sterner feeling, which these had battled with and overcome, as yet remained to haunt them. It might well be so. For he had indeed been full of just anger and bitter pain, as he thought of the misery which this woman had caused. He had indeed burned with indignation against her, as he thought of

his darling's dying state, and compared that which was with all that might have been. He had come prepared to be coldly civil in his manner,—to bear with her as gently as he could, simply for her daughter's sake. But at his first glance into her changed face, all his angry feelings had melted away. She, too, was paler and thinner than she had been, and in place of the egoistically plaintive look of invalidism which formerly had seemed to be begging, and bent on obtaining, sympathy, now there was an expression of self-forgetful grief which was indescribably touching, and went at once to Charles Grantham's heart. She had, besides, somehow, caught a look of Margaret, since he had seen her last; he had never been struck with any likeness between the mother and daughter before, but now the spirit of that daughter's nobleness was over her and influencing him, and in a moment all his anger was forgotten, and he remembered only that she was the mother of his best beloved, a sharer of his grievous pain and sorrow.

“Is it true?” she said at last, falteringly, while she peered searchingly into his altered face, and then turned away to look in a bewildered manner from Sir John Grantham to Mr. Thomas. “Is it true? Is it not a dream?”

Sir John’s hand was resting firmly on his son’s shoulder, and his glance was resting on his son’s face, and it would be hard to paint the mingling of pride, tenderness, and radiant irrepressible joy, with the sense that sorrow ought to be lurking somewhere, that were to be seen on his own countenance.

“True?” he answered, with a break in his tone. “True?” he went on, huskily, with an attempt at a laugh. “True?” he said again, with a sob in his voice. “True? Yes,—it is true enough that we have caught the impostor at last! After personating Charles Meredith, Dr. Carl, and nobody knows how many mountain guides, and other characters besides, he has come in at last, you see, to take us all in by personating Charles Grantham, to try to make himself out to be my son! My son!—ha! ha!” and Sir

John went off into a loud unmeaning nervous laugh, which made every one else follow suit involuntarily, in the like sort of odd, unnatural, incomprehensible manner.

But this silly, far from merry, laughter lasted only for a moment; and Mrs. Willoughby's full heart soon found a blessed relief in tears. What was the meaning of these tears and choking sobs which she vainly struggled to check, and yet for which she felt no shame? Surely she had cause enough for weeping, and the shame was not in the tears but in their cause. What mattered it to her if she were an object of contempt to others for ever and for evermore? She was not thinking of herself, but she would fain have restrained her weeping for the sake of those with her; and that she might question them,—learn all she yearned to learn,—speak out of the depths of her wonderful, wistful, far-fetched, obstinate, hopes,—give herself up utterly to sympathy with the joy and the sorrow of the father and the son. Over-mastering all the other feelings of her heart was one of keen and

thankful gladness that the father had found his son,—that her selfishness had not, after all, caused the ruin of his father's hopes,—had not, after all, caused the death of him whom she felt that she, too, could love as a son,—of him who was her daughter's best beloved. Underneath this gladness was a heavy weight of grief because the shadow of death was hovering over her treasure,—a weight heavy with a double grief!—with the added burden of a new found sorrow, that the two whom she had thought about to meet in joy, must now meet beneath the awful shadow of that death which was at hand to part them again! But far down in depths below the grief was a mighty hope, which, whether reasonable or otherwise, was not to be gain-said. It came surging up, through the grief and through the joy, seeming like a uniting spirit to fuse the two together. It came with the memory of the previous day's wrestling in prayer, and seemed to tell her of a prophecy of existing life, about to be revealed. It came to her with a word of comfort, not to be taken to herself, but to be

given to others. And she gave it. Looking up with sudden radiance, and speaking calmly and simply,—

“You have come in time to save her!” she said.

And the words made a hope leap up through his heart, as though they had indeed been words spoken by a seer of truth. “God grant it!” was his answer, in a low earnest tone. Then turning to Mr. Thomas, “Mayn’t I see her?” he asked, imploringly.

“Not now,—not to day,” answered Mr. Thomas; and then looking with a smile from Charles Grantham to Mrs. Willoughby, “This is the new physician, of whom I wrote you word,” he added. “But I am afraid he is hardly to be trusted, after all! What do you say? Will you allow him to prescribe for your daughter, after the proof of unreasonableness that he has just given? Mrs. Willoughby,” he went on, changing his tone, “I hoped to have spared you this shock! Sir John and I, after putting our heads together, had arranged a plan for pre-

paring you, which we persauded ourselves would answer.”

“Yes,” said Sir John, taking a letter out of his pocket, “we have managed badly between us.”

And while he turned to speak to Mrs. Willoughby, Mr. Thomas, putting his hand on his son’s arm, drew him into a corner by the window, saying as he did so,—

“I have explained to you why it is out of the question that you should see her this morning;”—and after a few minutes’ conversation in an undertone, *Dr. Carl* was convinced that Mr. Thomas was right in his opinion, and *Charles Grantham* was obliged to submit to the decree of the two medical men.

Meanwhile—“This letter, telling me his of safety, reached me only just before my son arrived at the Hall,” said Sir John. “I hoped it would have helped me to break the glad news to you, Mrs. Willoughby.”

“Ah,—you are too kind,” she returned, falteringly. “I have not apologized for keeping you waiting as I did; but you know

that I was with Margaret, and could not help myself."

"The letter is from Mr. Meredith," continued Sir John. "My son had written briefly to him, begging him to write to me."

"Perhaps it would have prepared me also for the change in his appearance. His face shows how terribly he has suffered! He must have been ill. That, too, is my doing!" said Mrs Willoughby, and her looks and tones were full of keenest and bitterest self-reproach.

"No," said Charles Grantham, returning to seat himself by Mrs. Willoughby's side, and speaking very gently and tenderly,—
"no, you were not accountable for my illness."

"He shall tell his own story if you are equal to listening to it now," said his father.

"And I, meanwhile," said Mr. Thomas, "if you will allow me, Mrs. Willoughby, will go up to see my patient."

"And you will tell her?"

"I will prepare her." So saying, Mr. Thomas left the drawing-room.

CHAPTER VII.

“Now, then, for your story,” said Sir John, turning to his son. “Begin at the very beginning, from the moment when you first left Fribourg.”

“That is scarcely necessary,” began Charles. “I left, as Mrs. Willoughby will know, in a state of desperation,—almost beside myself, hardly conscious of what I was doing,—forgetting, like a fool, all manner of things that I ought to have remembered.”

“You had been over-working yourself, and were over-wrought,—and had been troubled and bothered beyond measure, my poor boy; no wonder if you forgot a few things, and made a few mistakes,” interrupted his father.

“Amongst these things, I forgot to leave

my address at the post office," went on Charles. "I wrote from St. Martin, in answer to a letter I had received,—I wrote—I wrote to her,—giving my address to Chamounix, and begging, as a favour, for I knew she would not think me rude (I knew, he added to himself, that she would be glad to have something to do for me), that she would call at the post-office for my letters, and re-direct them for me,—or if this was not allowed, if I might not be permitted the boon of this glimpse of her hand-writing, this sign of her thought of me, I ventured to ask if she would be so kind as to get some one to attend to that little matter of business for me. The next day I went on to Chamounix. Each morning I awoke with renewed hope, each day my hopes died away, and then again I hoped. For the exhilarating mountain air, and glorious mountain scenes, and the complete change, and rest from mental work, braced my nerves and gave me fresh physical strength, and made it utterly impossible for me to resign myself to despair.

I seemed to gain new life,—new powers of love for *her*. And it appeared to me that my love must finally prevail over all obstacles, and win you over to our side of the question.

“ I had fallen in with a party of mountain explorers, containing several friends and acquaintances of mine, had joined their company, and made several successful expeditions with them. I felt that my holiday really had come about just in the nick of time ; for my strength, although it is pretty considerable, certainly had been somewhat over-taxed. Of course, however, I had no intention of remaining long away from my work at Fribourg. The ghosts of two many imploring eyes and sickly faces followed me, to allow of this. And Fribourg, with its new associations, with its love and with its work, was a sort of heaven in which my thoughts continually lived, amidst all the interest and enjoyment of my holiday. Notwithstanding this, my days were so much occupied, and my nights were so necessary to me after a day’s hard walking, that I put

off from day to day sending letters which I had intended to write,—whether for my own satisfaction's sake, or to please some of my poor patients, and other friends at Fribourg. I was every day expecting to receive forwarded tidings from my people, and being uncertain as to their whereabouts, continued to put off reporting my movements to them."

"And," interposed Mrs. Willoughby here, "you know whose fault it was,—you know how it happened,—that your letters were not forwarded to you?"

"Yes,—oh yes," answered Charles, quietly, "I know, I understand all about that."

"But *I* cannot understand it," said Mrs. Willoughby. "I do not know how I can look back upon it, and not die of grief and shame. It is as incomprehensible to me as it is dreadful."

"You look back upon it as one might look back upon things said and done, unaccountably, during a delirious dream. But now we will go forward.

"At last came the day on which we were to have made the ascent of the Col de Miage.

The morning proving wet, the expedition was postponed. I had written hurriedly, a day or two before, on the chance of my letter finding my people, a line mentioning what I was about to do, and promising to write again, with an account of my adventures; and now, determining to devote the first wet morning to letter-writing, I began a long history to my — my *other* father (here he looked at Sir John Grantham with a smile). But the clouds presently cleared off, and I was called upon to join in a discussion as to what should be done. Some of the party were bent upon climbing the Flégère, guideless. Others united with the *maitre d'hotel* in preaching prudence,—and foretelling fog and mists. I was one of the venturesome ones, eager for the climb. But I am thankful to remember that I joined company with the *dissauvers*, and only when I saw that all arguments had failed to change the minds of those who determined to go,—that go they would, whether I went or not,—resolved to make one of their party, hastily locked up my unfinished letter in my

desk, and prepared for the start. The sun shone out brightly as we began our walk, and we looked back at the hotel, with a laugh at the croakers who would have deprived us of an afternoon's easy enjoyment.

"I was engrossed in conversation with one of my companions, as we were making our way along the road leading to the Flégère, when one of the others, who were a little in advance of us, looked back, and called out, "'Here's a friend of yours, Charlie, or his ghost. Is not that the fellow you pointed out to us as Lord Mark Denham, the day before yesterday?'"

"'Does he see you?' said the other, as I came up with them. 'Is he going to cut you again? Is he afraid of being taken up for murder,—or of being tempted to murder you? There is something odd about him!'"

"'It is he, and he shall not escape me, this time, at all events,' I returned, laughing, and hurrying forward to the spot where Denham stood.

"He appeared to be engaged in bargaining with the driver of a return carriage from

Argentière, had evidently observed our party, and was looking now towards me, and now away from me, with gestures suggestive one moment of attraction, and the next of repulsion; but seeing that I was bent upon obeying the attractive influence, after a word to the driver, he came forward to meet me. He was looking ill and miserable, but greeted me cordially, and with something of his own peculiar genial smile.

“ ‘Hallo, old fellow, I am glad to have fallen in with you,’ he said.

“ ‘Indeed!’ I replied, laughing. ‘I should have gathered from your behaviour, that you were bent upon avoiding me!’

“ ‘Not you, only your regiment,’ he returned, with a grimace in the direction of my friends. ‘The truth is, Meredith, my mission is misanthropical at present, and I feel it my duty to avoid mankind as far as possible.’

“ ‘Then as I peered into his somewhat haggard face,—

“ ‘I must be off,’ he said, looking round restlessly towards the waiting carriage.

‘Tell me quickly, what brings you here, and what you have been doing with yourself? for I cannot stop a minute.’

“ ‘Where are you off to?’ was my response.

“ ‘Martigny, *en route* for—anywhere,—in short, I have not quite shaped my route yet.’

“ ‘Martigny!’ I exclaimed. ‘My dear fellow, don’t go to Martigny. I hear it is in a more unhealthy state than usual,—chock full of fever. Every one is fighting shy of that route, and it is the last place you ought to go to, in your present state.’

“ ‘My present state! Humbug! What do you mean? I’m right enough.’

“ ‘No you are not.’

“ ‘Besides, I am not going to live there. I am only going to put up at The Cygne, for a night. I sent my luggage on before me, and am bound to follow it. I had intended leaving this morning, but put off, with some notion of looking you up,—and then, changed my mind, and started for Argentière.’

“ ‘And how do you travel to Martigny?’

“ ‘After the drive to Argentière, on my legs, by the Col de Balme.’

“ ‘On foot! Why you are not fit to walk a mile!’

“ ‘Nonsense! Much you know! My dear fellow, I tell you walking is the one thing I am fit for, and that keeps me in my right senses.’

“ ‘Wait until to-morrow, and I’ll come with you?’

“ ‘Impossible! All my arrangements are made. Besides, Chamounix is haunted with horrors, as every place becomes for me, now-a-days, when I have been in it for any number of hours. Come with me now, there’s a good fellow,—why not?’

“ ‘But I have no knapsack of necessaries with me, and—’ I began, hesitatingly.

“ ‘Oh, I can lend you all necessaries, as many tooth-brushes, and the rest of it, as you wish,’ he interrupted, quickly.

“ ‘All right,’ I said. For I really felt he needed looking after. And going back, I made my explanations to the other three,

gave them the key of my desk, begged one of them to add a line to the letter I had written to my father, and to post it,—said that if I did not return shortly, they should hear from me, and then rejoined Denham, and seated myself with him in the carriage bound for Argentière.”

“ ‘The Tête-Noire would be an easier walk than the Col de Balme,’ I suggested, as we drove along.

“ ‘Easier? Are you afraid of difficulties, then?’

“ ‘No,—but you—’ I began.

“ ‘I, as I have told you, am in good training, and up to any amount of walking; and as I took a stroll half-way up the Tête-Noire, the other day, I don’t care to go through it again, just now.’

“ ‘What is the matter with you?’ I asked, presently, ‘and why are you haunted with horrors?’

“ He put me off with some sort of indefinite reply, but by-and-by the whole matter came out. He had gone home after his visit to Grantham, determined to work,

‘as,’ to use his own words, ‘as she would have me work.’ Evidently the result had been one of over-work, both in body and mind; and when in an over-strained and over-excited state, he had received the news of—of her engagement to Miles. And the shock of news which was worse to him than tidings of her death would have been, coming upon him suddenly, in his then condition, had nearly driven him, as he expressed it, out of his senses.

“ ‘There was nothing for it, then, but becoming a vagabond,’ he said; ‘and now I shall wander on until I have found her, and then wander home again, to die.’ ”

“ ‘Die?’ I said, ‘Oh, humbug! You have plenty of life left in you, yet.’ ”

“ ‘But my heart smote me for my words as I looked at him, and as he shook his head, or something of the sort, for answer.’ ”

“ ‘And where shall you go to, first, in search of her?’ I asked.

“ ‘If you had been in your berth, I should have gone to see you there,—with half a notion that I might get a sight of her, or

learn from you if Mrs. Willoughby had carried out her intention of making Fribourg head-quarters for a time.'

" 'You might have found her,' I replied, still there.'

" And then, how it came about, I hardly know, for, feeling what he was suffering, knowing that her love was for me, and not for him, I scarcely had the heart to speak of her to him,—how it came about I hardly know, but I did speak of her and of my meeting with her at Fribourg. I told him——"

Here Charles Grantham paused, while his face seemed to catch a sight from far away,—while a look of unutterable feeling came into his face and lingered there.

" Yes? " said Mrs. Willoughby, in a sort of eager whisper, " yes; and how did he take what you told him? "

" 'How?' Ah,—how can I make you know? How did he take it? He took it like an archangel, as he was and is! We were speaking of his smile. That smile, transfigured into something too heavenly

to be described in earthly words, was my answer. It lit his whole face up, literally, with a heavenly light,—and then he blessed me and thanked God, Whom he said he had found it hard to thank for many and many a day gone by!

“We had reached Argentière while talking, had begun our journey through the Col de Balme (at my entreaty, for his sake), with mules and guides, had dismissed and paid for both,—on his presently insisting that the uneasy movement of the one and the jabber, jabber, of the other were driving him wild,—and were now directing our footsteps up towards the Col de Balme Pension.

“‘Let us go to Fribourg at once, together,’ he said, hastening his footsteps as if he thought he might reach the place which held her, that very day. ‘I will see Mrs. Willoughby,—it shall be made all right for you and her, I——’”

Again Charles Grantham abruptly interrupted himself, for an instant, to continue,—with a look towards Mrs. Willoughby, with a smile, and with very gentle intona-

tion, "He said, Mrs. Willoughby, that he thought he should be able to explain matters to you, to make you see the thing in a different light; and I felt, as he spoke, that it might be so. I felt that he would be my salvation. And so it might have been, if—"

"Oh, why could it not have been so?" cried Mrs. Willoughby, in an involuntary burst of agony. "Why did you not come back and make it right?"

"If,"—went on Charles,—“things had not happened untowardly, as they did happen! But to proceed. The thought of travelling towards *her* seemed to act as a spur upon his powers, and he walked with astonishing energy, considering the feeble state of health in which he really was, until we had reached the summit of the Col. But when once we were within the doors of the Pension, I perceived that he was, in truth, very much exhausted, and absolutely refused to go with him a step farther that day; so it ended in our remaining where we were for the night.

"The next morning he appeared much re-

freshed, but thick mist and rain rendered it next to impossible for us to go on to Martigny. Late in the afternoon the weather somewhat cleared, and we went out to look about us, and consider what it would be best to do. It soon clouded over again, however, and as we strolled up towards the foot of the Rocher de La Croix de Fer, I persuaded him that we should do just as well by postponing our move until early the following morning,—making only a short halt at Martigny, and continuing our journey the same day, by train to Lausanne and Fribourg.

• “So, having settled our mind as to this, we wandered on, talking of many things, our talk seeming to chime in strangely with the wonderful, solemn, grand and yet dreary scenes amidst the partially enveloping mists through which we walked. The gloomy spirit which Denham had shaken off during our walk on the previous day had somewhat returned. He talked morbidly of a wasted life, useless affections, and a presentiment that his death was near at hand. Or if he rose at times into a brighter and more

hopeful state of mind, it was to talk in a somewhat forced and lofty strain of a life which must be lived independently of all earthly happiness or pleasure. In short he was not like himself. But I knew that the mood would pass, and allowed it to have its way; and perceiving that he often forgot himself and his personal troubles in the interest of the various subjects of conversation that now and again suggested themselves, I felt convinced that the walk was doing him good, and we continued it. Well,—we were talking, as I have said, strangely and solemnly, as those might talk whose thoughts are led by one who thinks he hears the fast-approaching footsteps of the shadow of death, when, suddenly, the sun burst through the clouds and gloriously changed the aspect of affairs around us. It gleamed through the mist which hung in the chasms beneath us, or climbed about the heights beyond and above our footing; it lit up brilliantly, here and there, a visible snowy peak or icy pinnacle, and it showed us, as a whole, a scene so magnificent and so new,

even to mountaineers of our experience, that, as we quickly turned to gaze, it almost took our breath away, and effectually stayed the perhaps gloomy words which a moment before had been about to pass our lips.

“ ‘Let us get forward!’ ” said Denham, at last, excitedly. We were close to the spot for which tourists make, in order to obtain a view of peculiar splendour, and in a few minutes had reached it, and turned to gaze again. ‘Ah’! cried Denham, presently, with a sort of gasp! ‘Ah! I remember telling her of this view,—I remember describing its magnificence to her, and how she looked as I did so; but I had never seen it like this, then,—transfigured into heavenly glory! We must tell her about it,—we must tell her how we saw it together. You will remember it, old fellow, shall not you, when all is right and blessed for you and her? You will remember this moment!’

“ Then after a minute’s silence,

“ ‘You will not forget to tell her,’ he said, ‘you will not forget to tell her, old fellow, if anything happens to me, and I never

see her again? You will tell her how we looked at it together, and thought of her?’

“I raised my eyes to his face, as he spoke. It was glowing with a light that answered to the light that was glorifying the view upon which he was gazing. It, too, was beautiful, with a strange seemingly not earthly beauty, such as I had never seen upon it before.

“‘Let us get forward,’ again he cried.

“‘Forward?’ I returned; ‘backward you mean. We have reached the end of our walk, and if we are to travel far to-morrow, you will be the better for a little rest to-day.’

“‘I am bent upon getting on to higher ground,’ he said. ‘The higher I go the better I am. I am twice the man I was when we started. Have you ever been up there?’ And he pointed towards the rugged mountain beneath which we were standing. ‘No? Well, then, you must go. I have been to the very top, and am quite equal to acting as your guide. It is glorious up there, and well worth doing. Come along!’

“‘But, my dear fellow, you don’t suppose

we could get to the top of that hill and back again before night-fall? ’

“ ‘The top? No, but up a little way higher.’

“ ‘These gleams are only passing,’ I began, following him with some reluctance, and yet not really thinking that the climb would do him any injury. Nor do I now think that in itself it would have hurt him.

“ ‘Yes,’ he interrupted, excitedly,—‘yes, and we are wasting time,—on,—“Excelsior!”’ he added, laughing, ‘that we may attain to a higher point of view before the glory of it has departed.’

“He had inspired me with something of his own enthusiasm, and I, too, felt eager for the adventure. In short, the mountain air was exciting us both, and was especially affecting him in his peculiar condition of body and mind.

“ ‘We shall have the mists down upon us in no time,’ I said, however, still rather drawing back, with a sense of uneasiness on his account, ‘and this mountain is dangerous, for—’ But a sudden exclam-

ation from Denham cut my words of remonstrance short, and I sharply raised my eyes to the sky to see the strange and unwonted sight that his were resting on. A strange and marvellous sight indeed! and one that struck us with all the more solemnity and significance, on account of the thoughts that had so lately been stirring within our minds,—on account of those things connected with life and death, spirit and matter, which we had so lately been discussing together. ‘I raised my eyes to see’—A great cross in the east! Well defined, soft and shadowy in tint,—it looked as if it alone had been revealed of things with which it had connection behind the veil of white mist, against which it darkly stood! We gazed at it in spell-bound silence, glanced wonderingly into each others’ faces, and then turned to gaze again, still without a word.

“ ‘What does that mean?’ said Denham, at length, in a quick whisper, and with a look in his eyes as though he were asking the question of some unseen being by his

side. Then turning to me, and beginning the climb, 'Let us get on,' he said, once more. 'Don't you feel as if it was calling us up higher?'

" 'Perhaps it is to remind us of the name of the mountain, and the sad event which gave it its name,' answered I.

" 'Perhaps we may see more of the wonder when we get on to higher ground,' went on Denham, making his way energetically upwards; while I followed with equal energy, anxious as he could be to see more of the wonders, and forgetting, at the moment, all other anxiety.

" 'Possibly we may discover the cause of this curious appearance as we ascend higher,' I said. 'Of course it must be the effect of some very extraordinary state of atmosphere. Tyndall, no doubt, would be able to tell us all about it.'

" But Denham was in no mood for matter-of-fact explanations.

" 'It means something more than a dozen Tyndalls would be able to tell us,' he said. 'When we are a little higher up, I believe

we shall see the shadow of the cross on the mountain peak above which it stands.'

"As we toiled up the mountain side, we lost and gained again, and lost once more the wonderful sight, until,—'Ah!' came as an exclamation from both of us, for, as we turned our backs on the now glowing sunset sky, we saw, encircled by an immense arch, our cross, side by side with another, and no longer colourless, but reflecting a pale golden-tinted light, which deepened as we gazed, and changed from gold to rich orange colour, and from orange to a brilliant fiery crimson.

"We watched while they glowed, and brightened and deepened in colour, until suddenly,—as suddenly as the wonderful sight had come before us,—it disappeared from view behind a thick mist which had fallen again all in a moment, and was gathering and increasing around and about us.

"'We have no time to lose,' said I, as we began the somewhat difficult descent. 'It is as well we had not got farther. It has been worth while doing it, though.'

“ ‘Yes,’ answered Denham, absently, and presently, ‘Those crosses meant something,’ he added, solemnly, in the tone of one speaking half aloud to himself, and then to me, ‘Meredith, if I die——’

“ ‘But you are not going to die,’ I interrupted, quickly. ‘People don’t die when they talk about dying. Besides, you talked in the same ridiculous manner before we saw those curious cross-shaped illuminated clouds, so what could they have to do with it? Keep your mouth shut, that the fog mayn’t get down your throat, or we shall have you laid up with cold to-morrow; and mind your steps, for the mist is getting awfully thick about our path.’

“ ‘If I die,’ went on Denham, as though he had not heard my words,—‘if I die without seeing her again, you will tell her——’

“ The sentence was never finished. What had become of Denham? Had his fancy proved correct? Had he been spirited away? Had he indeed departed this life,—vanished,—vanished from earth, after some marvellous, unusual manner? I had turned

my eyes away from him only for a moment, and when I looked round again, he had disappeared! Without a sigh, without a sound, without a sign of any sort of description, he had gone! I called, but my voice sounded strange and thick, and seemed too heavy-laden and powerless to send out words which might reach to any distance. Again and again I called, but again and again my words returned to me void. The mist had gathered more closely and thickly around me. I could hardly so much as see an inch before my face.

“Had we, then, fallen, while he dreamed of dying, into the valley of the shadow of death? Had things of a supernatural significance suddenly overtaken our footsteps in life? What strange thoughts came pressing upon me, in that most terrible moment, it would be difficult indeed to tell!

“After groping in the darkened atmosphere a step in the direction of his side of our path, I stooped to feel the ground. My hand clasped the edge of a crag, and then hung down into empty space! Unawares,

we must have been walking by the side of a chasm! As the horrible suggestion forced itself upon my mind, I was about, in my agony, to call to my friend again, in a cry of despair, when, suddenly, a sound, a word, a name,—the name of Margaret,—struck like a note of heavenly music upon my ear!

“ ‘ Margaret!’ ”

“ It came floating upwards and round about me, softly, pathetically, and in a tone that seemed as sweet almost as though Margaret’s own voice had spoken it.

“ ‘ Margaret!’ ”

“ Surely it must have been Denham’s spirit-voice that had uttered it, in a new tone, learnt in the land where his love had so lately found rest! This was, for the first instant, the thought that passed through my mind,—but the next,—‘ He is fallen, but he is alive!’ I thought; and I called again, this time hoping to obtain a response to my call. I called, and I repeated my call, but there was no response! What was to be done?

“ I cried wildly and loudly towards the

hotels below, for assistance, making sure, as I did so, that my cries were vain and useless. The darkness was thickening. I knew little of the bearings of the ground around the spot on which I stood. And it seemed next to impossible that I could find my way to the place where Denham might be lying. But a strenuous effort must be made, notwithstanding, and while I remained inactive, any faint hope of success there might be was lessening. Feeling my way carefully, I scrambled higher up,—now with difficulty, slowly, stumblingly, with a sense that a false step might be the means of precipitating me into depths below, then with despairing haste, forgetting all necessity for caution, ignoring, for the moment, difficulties and dangers, in the strong agony of desire to reach Denham before it might be too late. At length, having gained a certain point, once more, after many like trials, I put out my hand to feel the outer edge,—to my right,—of the path which I had made for myself.

“ I put it out and felt no longer rock, but

herbage, and drawing the conclusion that I must have got to the edge of a grassy steep leading into a hollow in the mountain side, I determined to risk a descent. Scrambling, slipping, ignorant as to where each downward movement might be taking me, getting along as much by aid of my hands as of my feet, I descended lower, lower, until at length, with a jerk, I came straight down upon a jagged piece of rock. Then, cautiously, carefully,—peering through the thick atmosphere, but trusting rather to feeling than to sight,—all jarred and bruised as I was by my fall, I continued, after a few moment's rest, to work my way to the edge of the large rock on which I had stumbled, and to clamber down its perpendicular side. But the doubtfulness and peril of my situation had not lessened with my descent! I found myself landed in a rocky region, evening shadows were drawing on apace, the darkness of a misty night had soon overtaken me, and it became no easy matter, indeed, to make any way whatever. At times I was sorely tempted to give up the struggle

altogether! Then again I took heart; and at last, after making a desperate effort,—forcing myself forward, up and down, now slipping into some cleft, from which I with difficulty succeeded in extricating myself, now bringing my head into rude contact with some sharply-jutting-out piece of rock, freshly bruised and grazed, and with a slightly sprained ankle,—at last I was rewarded by finding myself lodged on a patch of marshy ground, which brought to my mind a glimmer of hope for my friend. Turning instinctively to my right, I trudged slowly and painfully on along the wet and slippery ground, until, suddenly, I stumbled against something that lay in my path. I stumbled, and started as I stumbled,—for the thing against which I had stumbled gave a groan. It was my friend, and my friend alive! It did not require an instant of consideration to assure myself of the joyful fact! I called him by his name, and received, in reply, a word that was little better than a groan; but the voice in which it came to me was unmistakably the voice of Denham.

Oh, for a light! With the longing, came the recollection that I had a box of vesuvians in my pocket. I struck several of them, and, by the light that they gave, took in not only Denham's motionless form, pale face, and closed eye-lids, but also the height,—which appeared not to be very considerable,—of the jagged cliff over which he had fallen, together with the nature of the soft corner of muddy earth which luckily lay near its foot. On striking fresh lights, and looking round, I perceived a small scoop in the rock, quite full of water from the heavy rain which had fallen in the morning. Adding some of this to a little brandy which I happened to have with me in a pocket flask, I put it to his lips, and forced some of it down his throat. It had the effect of reviving him. He moved,—groaning as he did so,—made an effort to rise, and as he sank back again to the ground, said, faintly,—

“ ‘Where am I? I thought I was dead.’

“ ‘No, you are alive, and I am with you,’ I answered, cheerily. ‘We shall soon have you on your feet again.’

“ ‘I thought I was dead,’ he repeated, ‘and that she had fallen with me !’

“ This time he spoke with more energy, but with a certain amount of wildness and incoherency, which I did not quite like. I bathed his forehead with the cold water, and raised his head, and put my arm about him, plying him at intervals with a fresh dose of the brandy and water. In this manner we rested for some time, in the solemn dusky stillness ; I remaining widely and anxiously awake, he from time to time dozing, or starting up suddenly out of his fitful slumber,—sometimes with a cry or a groan. At last,—

“ ‘What has happened to me ?’ he said, in his own natural tones. ‘Is that you, Meredith ? Did I fall ? I suppose I must have fallen. I saw *her* and I followed her ! I thought she wanted me. I followed her, and I suppose I must have fallen !’

“ ‘You mistook your footing through the thickness of the fog, and fell. You were talking of her just before you fell, and have been dreaming of her since. Fortunately,

you fell upon soft ground. You will be all right soon, and we will go and see *her* together.'

"‘I saw her,’ he repeated, in a low earnest, quietly excited tone,—I saw her as certainly as when last we met at Grantham! I saw her,—I felt called to follow her. I followed her, and then—what had happened I did not know,—I only knew that I had lost her! I called her, as it seemed to me, with my dying breath; and after that, I believe, I dreamt that I was dead,—dead through the loss of her!’

"‘Thank God!’ I said, ‘that you did call her, for it showed me where you were. It told me that I might hopefully undertake the search which has led me here,—to find you alive, and I trust not seriously hurt. Try, now that you have somewhat recovered from the shock,—try to move a little,—tell me whereabouts the movement causes you pain?—that I may see if I can do anything to relieve you.’

"But he took no heed of my inquiries or thoughts about himself.

“‘It was strange,’ he said, as though I had not spoken,—‘it was strange,—that sight of her!’

“‘Yes,’ I answered, assuming a light tone,—‘yes, it was curious, but easily to be accounted for. Your imagination was much excited. Your nerves were on the *qui vive* for sights and sound. You have not been in your usual state of health of late, and have had much to try you, physically and mentally. Your mind was full of her,—in short, the thing is easily to be accounted for.’

‘But although I said this,—although my better reason corresponded to the words which I had spoken,—I could not, do what I would, divest my mind of a great dread, which I told myself was absurd and superstitious. Might not that appearance have been really ominous? A thousand apparitional stories which I had heard of, and looked upon as only apparently inexplicable, came flitting through my brain, stirring my heart with mighty fears and strong tremblings, which I should have owned to Denham had his state been other than what it was. It

was strange, that appearance ! All that had happened to us was strange and unusual ! Ought we not to take it as a warning to prepare for evil tidings ? Something *might* have happened to Margaret ! What ? Illness ? Difficulty ? Pain ? Had she sent her spirit to call us to her aid ? Was she— Ah,—what might not have happened ? Was she dead ? Had she come in a form which Denham only had had the faith to see,—to tell us of her death ? ”

A great agony,—a new dread,—struck across Mrs. Willoughby’s heart at this part of the narrative. Had not Margaret been ill ? Had she not been suffering, persecuted,—through and by her *mother*,—at the time of that appearance ? Might she not be said to be lying now almost at the point of death, upstairs ? Might not that appearance have been significant of an evil which then was ?—ominous of a more terrible evil yet to come ?

“ Denham,” went on Charles,—“ Denham only answered below his breath,—solemnly and wonderingly,—

“ ‘It was strange,—it was strange, strange ?’ ”

“‘What did the vision look like?’ I asked, tremblingly.

“‘As she always looks! You best know how she looks, I suppose! I need not picture her, with all her sweetnesss and her beauty, to you!’ He tried to laugh as he spoke, and then changing his tone, added, ‘But yet, ah! she looked more radiantly, extraordinarily lovely than I have ever seen her in the flesh,—and yet had a look of pitiful, loving sorrow with the radiance. Meredith,—I believe that, when I die, that is the look which she will have to me!’

“‘Ah!’ answered my heart, ‘she came in loving pity to tell us,—to tell *me* of her death!’ But aloud I answered, ‘It is not death, however, or visions, but life and reality, that we have to think of now. Try your powers of movement,—do,—there’s a good fellow. See if you can get up,—I will help you.’”

“He obeyed me, but quickly sank back again, with an exclamation of pain.

“‘Where is it?’ I asked.

“‘My feet,—my legs,—everywhere, I be-

lieve!’ he said, with something of a groan.

“‘If we could only get rid of this confounded darkness,’ I cried, impatiently, ‘I might be able to do something for you. Stay, I must make the attempt,’ and I put my hand in my pocket, in search of my few remaining vesuvians. But at the same instant the moon shone out, though feebly, through the mist, and by its glimmering, but increasing light, I managed to remove the boots and stockings, and make an imperfect examination. ‘No bones broken, so far as I can make out. You must have fallen upon your feet! The best of omens, if they are to be looked upon as worth your consideration,’ I said, while, tearing up my pocket-handkerchief into bandages, I proceeded to apply to both ankles the only remedy I had at hand, that is to say, a dressing of cold water.

“I had wrapped him up as warmly as I could (which, being interpreted, means that Charles Grantham had taken off his own coat to wrap about his friend),—for myself,

the excitement of anxiety kept the blood coursing sufficiently quickly through my veins,—and from time to time I rubbed his hands, and then again supporting him with my arm, I watched and waited while he dozed, and dreamed, and started.

“ ‘ Nothing for it but to make the best of the situation, until day-break, when I must leave him and go in search of aid,’ I thought. And having lit my pipe, I gave myself up to meditations on the best way of having him conveyed to the hotel, and the kind of treatment that might then be necessary for him ; and while these branched out into other considerations, thoughts of wonder, hope, and fear, and remembrances which no situation could make otherwise than sweet and soothing to the spirit, all unawares I lost myself in slumber.

“How long I slept I cannot say. I only know that when at last I awakened, with a start, the sky was cloudless, the large full moon was shining brilliantly, the air was clear and piercingly cold, every vestige of mist had disappeared, and a full blaze of

light enabled me to see our close surroundings, almost as distinctly as if it had been daylight. I raised my eyes to the height over which Denham had fallen, and as I did so, their glance encountered something which made me start once more, in wonder and doubt, and in wonder and almost certainty, and once again in doubt! I seemed to see standing at the top of the crag, a tall, narrow-chested, stooping figure, which I recognised as the figure of Miles Grantham! Was it, could it be so? Was it, indeed, Miles Grantham in the flesh? Or was fancy bent on playing tricks with me, as well as Denham? Was I dreaming still, in only seeming wakefulness? Had Denham's mind, and mine, found their way into some strange phantasmagoria, where our imaginations were no longer under our own control? What in the world could Miles be doing at such a time of night, in such a scene as this? The notion that it was actually and truly Miles' self seemed as wild and preposterous as the belief that it was some spirit-sent messenger

from afar, with evil tidings from an evil man !

“ While I looked and wondered, however, he, or his shadow, whichever it might be, instantaneously disappeared. And the next moment I heard sounds which gave indisputable proof that the apparition had been of no ghostly or shadowy nature. I heard voices, and knew one of them to be, in very truth, the voice of Miles Grantham ! ‘ Hie ! ’ I cried, ‘ hie ! ’ in an agony of fear lest through my foolish doubts and wondering thoughts I should have lost the opportunity of obtaining human aid.

“ ‘ Yes;—yes,—we are on our way ? ’

“ ‘ Oui,—oui,—nous viendrons, nous viendrons ! ’

“ ‘ Tout de suite ! Tout de suite ! ’

“ These were the welcome answers I received.

“ ‘ Thank God ! ’ I said to myself. ‘ For whatever mischief Miles may be up to,—and he must be up to some, nothing else could take him half way up a mountain, on a cold moonlight night,—his companions, at all

events, may be able to give me the help I want; and poor Denham's life may be saved!' Thinking thus, I anxiously awaited their arrival, which came about sooner than I could have believed possible. Of course the two guides who were Miles' companions knew of a shorter and easier way than that by which I had stumbled through the mist, a while before. They appeared to be rough but efficient men, and declared themselves to be perfectly able to carry Denham to the hotel, on a plaid which Miles lent for the purpose, and that it was quite unnecessary to waste time in fetching the mattress on which I had intended to have my patient strapped. So after I had given them promises of handsome payment, and had made Denham swallow some of the brandy and water which they had with them, and we had completed all the necessary arrangements for the descent, we began our difficult and slow return.

"As we went, I made inquiries and received explanations, which, however, did not satisfy me as to what could have inspired Miles

Grantham with a desire to save my life, or, rather, what could have induced him to bestir himself to the performance of an act which might look like such a desire! His story was that he had left home, rather later than the rest of the world, for a continental trip,—had been spending a short time at Homburg, and other delightful watering-places, and was now, for a change, taking a run through Switzerland. He had left Martigny, he said, when the day cleared that afternoon,—had fallen in with another pedestrian,—in company with him had been overtaken and hindered, now and again, by heavy fog and drizzle,—in company with him, as he neared the hotel, had been startled by feeble cries as of some person or animal in distress,—had almost forgotten the circumstance, until it was mentioned by his accidental companion, and became a subject of conversation at a *table d'hôte* supper,—had heard then that some anxiety was felt on account of two tourists, who had left the hotel that afternoon, intending to return for dinner,—had heard that Lord Mark Denham

and his physician, Dr. Carl, were the missing 'Messieurs,'—and (being acquainted with my adopted name, and reading 'between the lines') had determined to make an effort to save them, and, finally, had hired the services of the two guides who were acting now as poor Denham's bearers.

“ ‘What in the world could have induced the fellow to act in a manner so far from characteristic of himself? Depend upon it there is something at bottom which would prove it to be, on the contrary, an act highly characteristic!’ I mentally questioned, and mentally observed. ‘Did he hope,’ I asked myself, ‘to find my dead and mangled body, and to carry home to Margaret a pathetic and pitiful tale of my mournful end, and his own brotherly efforts to save me? Does he now intend to make away with the whole party, faithful guides and all, before we can reach the hotel?’ Meanwhile, he continued civilly and good-naturedly to beguile the way by his conversation,—giving me scraps of gossip, and at last confiding to me a piece of news which made my puzzle with regard

to his motives of action all the greater. Yes, he told me one piece of news, I did not know that he was reserving to himself another!—that of the discovery known then to all concerned in it, but myself alone! Could I have divined this, I should indeed have had good reason to suspect that he had followed me to the mountains with no friendly intent! But knowing nothing of it, I listened, as I say, with renewed wonder to his tidings.

“‘I say, Meredith,’ he went on, ‘have you seen anything of *her* lately? You know whom I mean,—the fair Marguerite! You need not be afraid of me any longer, I have given her up,—relinquished her in your favour, old fellow! To say the truth, I believe I never cared about her really, only those women were so bent upon having me for her that, knowing her own pretence at dislike of me was only a copy of her countenance, I did my best to oblige them all! But I was continually finding myself dazzled by the brightness of other eyes than hers. And now I have given myself up to their

fascinations,—in short, you may congratulate me, for she has promised to be mine, with or without her snobbish old father's consent.'

"I could have knocked the fellow down as he spoke, even though my heart gave a leap of joy at the tidings that Margaret was free for ever from fear of his impertinent persecutions. But my only answer was congratulatory.

" 'And what might her name be, may I ask?' I added, presently.

" 'Oh, Alice Craycroft, of course,' he replied. 'But the engagement is a secret at present, if you please. Her father is a screw, and has not yet come round to the notion of giving his daughter to any one who is less of a Cræsus than he is himself.'

" 'If this story is true he can have no possible reason for wishing to get rid of me; but neither can I divine any motive strong enough to make him put himself out of his way in order to have the honour of saving my life and Denham's. I cannot give him credit for ordinary human kindness or

charity,' I said to myself, as we trudged along.

“But now, at length, we had arrived at the end of our journey, the bearers had deposited their burden in a room *au premier* of the Pension, and, ceasing to ponder over the enigma which had been puzzling me, I gave all my thoughts to the examination of poor Denham's hurts. These, although no bones were broken, and there was no evidence of internal injury, I found to be somewhat serious. His right knee joint was dislocated, the ancles were more severely sprained than I had supposed, and he was, besides, much bruised and shaken, and sorely grazed in many parts. There was nothing dangerous about his state,—but the cure was likely to be a long and troublesome business. And when I said good-bye to Miles, on the following morning, I told him I could see no prospect of our quitting our present quarters for a fortnight to come. He was himself on his way to Chamounix, and I ventured to ask him to leave a note for me at the hotel where I had been lodg-

ing with my friends. I say ventured, for although I could divine no possible reason why he should fail me in the performance of a good-natured act, which would cause him little trouble and could do no injury, I felt a certain misgiving as I put the letter into his hand.

“After events proved my misgiving to have been correct, for it is certain that the letter never reached its intended destination. Of course Miles heard on his arrival at Chamounix of the loss of certain pedestrians on the Flégère, and took good care to keep dark the fact that he knew that I was not one of them. The confusion between the name by which my companions called me, and my other name of Dr. Carl, may have helped to prevent the discovery of my safety. That news of the sad accident to my friends should not have reached me on the Col de Balme may seem strange. But, in truth, the passers-by from Chamounix were few, and their visits fleeting; and my days and thoughts were so completely engrossed by Denham that I found no time, and as little

inclination, for conversing with tourists or the inmates of our hotel. In short, Denham's state was such as to require constant attention, and I rarely left him. When I did so, it was only to eat a solitary meal, or to take a hurried walk in the immediate neighbourhood.

“ He fretted much over the tedious delay in our movements, and at the slow progress towards recovery that he seemed to be making. It was evident to me that his restlessness was retarding his amendment, and that confinement to the house was telling upon his general health. And at the end of ten days he was so little better, and appeared to be falling into so low and weak a state, that I determined to run the risk of a move. He eagerly hailed the notion, and appeared to improve almost from the moment that I proposed it. He discussed with me the easiest routes to Fribourg. He declared himself to be equal to any length of journey; and it ended in my being more firmly convinced than ever that change of air and scene, with the knowledge that he was near-

ing the place on which his heart was set, and the time when his generous efforts with regard to Margaret and myself might be carried out, would benefit, more than the fatigue of travelling would harm him. So I hired bearers and a *chaise-à-porteurs*, and the day following that on which I had formed the resolution, we were off on our way to Martigny. This seemed the shortest and simplest route to Fribourg, and therefore, as it was of some importance that Denham should pick up his luggage at The Cygne, and I hoped that sleeping one night in the unhealthy town would not prove harmful to him, we decided upon taking it; although, on account of his invalid state, I should otherwise rather have inclined myself to the round by Chamounix and St. Martin.

“Denham was in high spirits as we left the hotel, despite the pain which any movement still caused him; and, notwithstanding the fatigue which overcame him as we journeyed forward, he seemed distressed whenever, by my orders, his bearers came to a halt.

“ ‘ Are they tired already ? ’ he would say.

“ ‘ You are, at all events.’

“ ‘ Oh, let us get on. Nothing wearies me so much as a standstill ! I have a presentiment that something will come to delay us, and that we shall never get to Fribourg ! ’ Or,—‘ Pray don’t let the fellows waste so much time, unnecessarily ? If they are not quick, I shall die before they get me to an end of this miserable experience ! ’

“ But he seemed so faint and exhausted at intervals, that, in spite of his entreaties, I was obliged to insist upon many a wearisome halt. On these occasions, when I had done the best I could to make the rest an easy one for him, having forbidden him to talk, and ordained that silence should be kept by the whole party, I found myself involuntarily examining the faces of his bearers,—Pierre and Jean, by name,—and coming to the conclusion that Pierre’s was one of the worst, and Jean’s one of the best, countenances that I had ever fallen in with. They were the two men who had acted as Miles Grantham’s guides, and Denham’s carriers,

on the night of our adventure on the mountain of the Croix de Fer; and I had chosen them for the present day's work, without consideration of other characteristics than those of the strength and agility which apparently made them suitable candidates for it. But we never started forward again after a halt, without my finding myself haunted by the evil expression of Pierre's face. Whichever way I gazed, however striking the point on which my glance might be turned, whether rugged rock, or pine-clad height, or icy pinnacle, or snow-covered peak, Pierre's eyes were always looking out of it, and always looking with some dark and evil intent.

“ ‘If I had examined that man's features sooner, I would not have taken him as one of Denham's bearers, on any one's recommendation,’ I said to myself. ‘He is a fellow who would make no bones about precipitating all three of us down into the depths of the earth, if he had personal ends to gain thereby! Luckily, his own personal ends are best gained by taking his part in

bearing us safely to the end of this day's journey. But I don't wonder that evil prognostications should cross Denham's mind, in the near proximity of such a countenance as Pierre's ! It is enough to put a nervous patient into a chronic condition of waking or sleeping nightmare.'

"However, we reached the end of the tedious descent into Martigny without adventure or *contretemps*. We passed through the foul-aired streets of the town with wonderful rapidity, but too slowly to suit my anxiety on my patient's account.

" ' Ah,' he panted, feebly, ' the sooner we are out of this the better ! '

"And even I felt half suffocated by the stifling fever-laden atmosphere which we had entered.

"At last we reached The Cygne ! and I paid and dismissed the bearers, giving to them something over their right payment, and receiving from one well gratified thanks, and from the other discontented mutterings, while he looked at the money in the palm of his hand. I had not time, however,

for listening to gracious acknowledgments, or discontented complaints. Denham was utterly exhausted, looked frightfully ill, and needed all my thoughts and attention.

“‘I wish we could get on at once,’ he said, presently, when he had a little revived.

“‘I wish we could, but I fear it is out of the question. You have had enough of it for one day.’

“‘Yes, I am dead beat! But this air would kill me if I were to remain any longer in it. However, after a good night’s rest, I dare say I shall be able to fight on to Lausanne.’

“Ah, if it could have been so, all might yet have been well!

“‘Oh, yes, I replied to him, cheerfully,’ we will get you to bed at once, and, depend upon it, you will be a different creature in the morning. A good night’s rest will make all the difference in you.’

“But my heart misgave me even while I spoke. I did not like his look; and I inwardly upbraided the rash folly which had made me sanction his travelling so soon, or,

at all events, taking the Martigny route. A good night's rest would indeed have made all the difference to him ! but a good night's rest was what he was not likely to have, and what he did not have.

“ All night long he was tossing feverishly about, unable to sleep, excepting fitfully ; complaining of headache, shiverings and heat, and at times talking as though his mind were wandering. I hoped that a good deal of all this might be the effect of over-fatigue and excitement, and would pass off ; but I much feared, what the next day's symptoms proved to me, that he was in for a severe attack of typhoid fever. And before many days had passed, the symptoms had become more alarming, and he was very dangerously ill.

“ Several weeks went by, during which I scarcely left his bed-side. I watched anxiously the variations and fluctuations of his state. I watched anxiously and fearfully ! But although the changes that took place had hitherto been principally for the worse, I still retained a faint shadow of hope

that better symptoms might show themselves in time.

“At length, I knew that a crisis was at hand. I looked for it, in an agony of fear and hope. It came! The change that it brought was for the better! And from that day, to the end of several more weeks, each day showed a marked, although slight, improvement in his condition. But I had not yet ventured to leave his room for more than a short time, while I walked a little distance in search of fresh air,—which was not to be so easily found,—and turned by instinct into poor houses, where men, women, and children lay dying of fever, for lack of medical attendance. During this period I had had no fears for myself. It had simply never occurred to me to suppose it possible that the fever would pick me out as one of its victims. And probably my very fearlessness had acted as a safe-guard. But at last there came a day when I was seized with a horror that I, too, was about to be ill.

“‘It will not do,’ I said to myself. ‘It is out of the question that I should allow my-

self to be laid up while Denham still needs me! It is out of the question that *I* should cause a farther delay in the carrying out of our plans! But the fact is plain that I cannot live any longer on the Martigny substitute for air. I must bully these awkward symptoms, by taking a stretcher in search of a dose of life.'

"My spirits rose as I formed my resolution. Having begged a garçon, who had been extremely civil and attentive throughout Denham's illness, to look in upon him from time to time, I went down to the *salle-à-manger* to eat a mouthful of luncheon, before starting on my walking expedition. I felt like a schoolboy who has had an unexpected holiday granted to him, and the very thought of the *live* air which I was about to breathe again, seemed to have renewed in me a touch of such appetite as I had not known for weeks. I was eating quickly, impatient to be off, without so much as knowing whether I was eating in company or not, when my attention was suddenly arrested by the sound of a voice that I knew. I

looked up, to see, seated at the farther end of the table, and giving orders to one of the garçons in attendance, the unwelcome figure of Miles Grantham. The very sound of his voice, the very sight of him, the very knowledge that he was in the room, seemed to act as a lowering damper on the newly-risen fervour of my spirits.

“ ‘Confound the fellow!’ I said to myself, ‘what brings him here, I wonder, with his bird-of-ill-omen-like face? He does not see me, I think,—or he wishes it to appear that he does not. Well, it shall be a mutual cut, with all my heart, for the present, at all events; when I have taken a dose of oxygen I may be better able to cope with him.’

“ I left the table and turned towards the door leading into the hall. As I did so, I seemed to feel Miles’ eyes upon me. ‘He is thinking about me. He is cursing me. He is revolving mischief in his crooked mind.’ Hastily and involuntarily, as so many flashes of lightning, the thoughts rushed through my brain, while I opened the door and left the room.

“With the sensation of being followed still by the eyes which had never been honestly raised to face mine for an instant, I was making my way out of the hotel, when I found myself being gazed at curiously by another pair of eyes, which might have been in league with those of Miles Grantham. They were evil eyes, belonging to a face whose evil expression had haunted me ever since the day of our move to Martigny. In short, Pierre, the guide, was standing in the door-way, leaning corner-ways against the wall, and looking idly about him, with looks which seemed to carry mischief with them as they went.

“‘What is that confounded fellow doing here, too?’ I mentally exclaimed, with apparently unreasonable irritation,—and instinctively I was turning my back on him, with the sudden notion that I would take another look at Denham before starting for my walk, when the man’s ‘Bon jour, monsieur,’ rendered it impossible for me to avoid speaking to him.

“‘Bon jour,’ I replied. ‘A misty day.’

“ Ah, yes, yes, here,—but up in the mountainous parts,—it is magnificent ! ’

“ ‘ Getting late though, for the passes ? ’

“ ‘ Ah,—yes,—they will soon be closed. It is not fit for the gentlemen to come alone, even now. They might be overtaken by a snow-storm. I have just come over the Tête-Noire with the monsieur, your friend,—you have perhaps seen the monsieur ? ’ ’

“ ‘ Yes,—no,—I am in a hurry,—I cannot stay. I am going to look for this sunshine you tell me of ! ’ ’

“ ‘ Up towards the Tête-Noire, perhaps ? ’

“ ‘ Yes. Good-day to you,’—and I left him, but must needs, it seemed, I cannot say why, keep to my hastily-formed intention of looking in upon Denham for a minute before starting.

“ The minute grew to many minutes,—for Denham had half a dozen things to say to me. Had I written again to his brother ? It was so strange that there was no answer.

“ Yes, I had written several times. Ah,—of course he was abroad still, wandering no one knew where. It would be better to write

to his sister now that he was getting better. So I promised to write to her the next day, unless he was well enough to write himself. And why, he asked, did I not write again to Miss Willoughby? Ah, I did not dare to do that. She had not taken any notice of my other letter. I feared to displease her. It would be better to wait as patiently as I could until he and I could go to Fribourg together. But there were several letters that I must write the next day. It was strange my hearing nothing from Chamounix. I supposed I must speak by-and-by to that scoundrel Miles, after all. And I made up my mind to write to Mr. Thomas the next day, to ask for Grantham news, and whether Mrs. and Miss Willoughby had returned.

“ ‘You look ill,’ said Denham, suddenly staring at me.

“ ‘Do I?’ I laughed, ‘I am perfectly well, except for the want of a walk. I will be off, and come back a giant refreshed, to tell you my adventures.’ ‘Now,—to make my escape without falling in with thieves by the way!’ I added to myself, as, looking

neither to the right nor left, I hastened towards the hall-door, and out into the open air.

“‘Ah,—now I may take my breath! No not just yet! Pah, what stuff it is that they are pleased to denominate air in this place!’

“‘Quick, quick,’ said my footsteps,—‘quick, quick, to higher ground, before something, before some one,—before something,—can come to stop short your ascent. It will be all right, everything will be well, if you can only succeed in gaining a clearer atmosphere, and taking a draught of new life!’

“‘Bon jour, monsieur.’

“It was in a friendly voice this time that the greeting was uttered. I must speak a word with Jean. He had come, he said, with a lady and gentleman from Chamounix, and had seen me, and determined to speak to me. But he had only a moment, for he had arrangements to make with a party at the hotel.

“‘Ah, bon jour! I will not keep you,’ I said, rather eagerly, in my anxiety to be spared farther delay.

“‘But where was I going?’ he asked, ‘Ah, do not go,—I beseech you, do not go! It is late. It is cold. You look ill. Some mischief may befall you. I beseech you not to go.’

“In short, he had a thousand good reasons to give why I should not take my walk. But I laughed at them, and went on my way at a greater rate than ever, saying to myself, as I did so, ‘I suppose he thinks that without the guardianship of guides, safety, even for the shortest and easiest expedition, is out of the question. Ah!’ I breathed out, when at last I had got fairly beyond the atmosphere of the Martigny valley,—‘ah! it is worth while stopping to take breath here!’ And as I looked forward towards the wild rocky ground beyond and above me, feasting my eyes on deep shadows and patches of golden sunshine, feeling meanwhile the touch of the exhilarating mountain air, a thousand burdens, a thousand anxieties, which had seemed to be weighing my spirits down of late, now passed away, and left only the prospect of a fair field of free and

glorious life, to be traversed all joyfully and easily. Now that I had reached freer air, I walked more leisurely, letting my eyes wander various ways, and taking in the strange wild beauty of the exterior prospect, none the less that my mind was engrossed with many trains of thought entirely disconnected with it. It was indeed a strange and desolate scene! I had as yet scarcely observed a single living thing moving upon it, and had not met with one human being. But at length,—

“ ‘Hallo!’ I said to myself, while still the undercurrent of my thoughts flowed on, and the observation I was making appeared to me of little moment,—‘hallo!—what is that chamois-hunter doing here? What does he expect to find? Certainly there are no chamois about here, whether or not it is true, as they tell me, that the creature is almost extinct in Switzerland.’ ‘Hallo!’ I repeated, as once more the mystery of a man in hunter’s costume where no chamois were to be found, came into view,—‘hallo! why there’s that fellow again! Where in the

world did he spring from this time? I saw him up amongst the higher rocks but a minute ago. I shall begin soon to suspect that he is the spectre of some chamois-hunter who lost his life in these wild parts!’

“ ‘Here we are again!’ This was after another interval, and another unexpected appearance. ‘I might be a chamois myself, by the way in which he seems to be dodging my footsteps.’

“ ‘Hang the fellow!’ I exclaimed, at last, with an increased sense of impatient annoyance, when again he came into view; and in order to escape the troublesome company which was intruding upon my solitude, and disturbing my thoughts, I proceeded to quicken my footsteps.

“ ‘There! now I think I am rid of him!’ I cried out, at last, looking around. ‘Now,’ I added silently, ‘now I may stay to recruit my strength, and enjoy my familiar friend and these wilds in peace! Ah-h! it is cold, though,’—and I found myself shivering, as I had never shivered after taking healthy exercise before. ‘And what right have I,’

I thought, 'to be so breathless, after such an ascent as this? Why, I am as short-winded as a feeble girl. And in spite of the cold, having lighted my pipe, I flung myself down upon the ground to rest, experiencing as I did so, an extraordinary amount of exhaustion.'

"I had only just seated myself, when, lo! the air was suddenly shaken, and with the loud report of a gun, and a 'whizz, whizz, whizz!' a shot passed over my head! 'Hallo!' I cried, starting up,—'hallo, my man! Are you mistaking me for the chamois?' I had scarcely finished my exclamation when,—'Bang!' went the gun again. Instinctively and instantaneously I moved a step to the right, and lowered my head. In time? In time,—yet, ah, what had happened? A whizz, whizz, bringing a sudden pain, a sudden shock,—a faintness, —a tottering,—a vain struggle,—and I had fallen to the ground!

"'This will not do,—I must escape, somehow!' Feebly the thought passed through my mind! Feebly I strove to

rise! Futile was the effort! As I made it, there seemed to come a rushing sound like that of a whirlwind through the air! There seemed to come a sensation as though the whole earth were being shaken to its foundation. What was the meaning of it all? Were a whole troop of armed warriors preparing to make an assault on one wounded man? What was this,—this sudden sense of oppression and suffocation that I was feeling? I opened my eyes,—slowly, wearily. ‘Ah, I see,—I plainly see! Death!—Death come in an ugly form,—that is all!’ Pierre,—the fellow whose evils countenance had haunted my sleeping and waking thoughts,—was upon me,—his loaded gun was already pointed to my chest,—he was about to pull the trigger,—there was no escape! He was the chosen messenger for me, of Death.—Death! It must be faced! ‘What will it bring me? My God,—what will it bring me? What will Margaret say? my Margaret! my love! Shall I find her again? Will they take her from me?’

“All in an instant, while I thought thus,

there came a change. Was it the change of death? Was I free? What had removed the sense of weight and oppression? What was about to happen to me now? What was this going on all around and about me? Some tremendous scuffle surely must be taking place over my dead body! In the midst of which came a rushing sound,—a hurricane,—growing fiercer, and then gradually sinking,—sinking into silence,—while I fell, fell, fell,—as it seemed,—with the falling earth, lower, lower, for ever lower, into space below space,—down, down, lower, lower, for ever and for evermore! But no! what was this? Once more there seemed to be a change. What had taken place? Where were they bearing me to? Or was I falling still? Had I touched some world to find kind arms to raise and bear me up and carry me to the shelter of a grave? At length, after seemingly countless ages, I opened my eyes and looked. Where was I? What was that scorching light which hurt me and made me blink, and close my eyelids once more? I put out my hand to feel.

What had gone with the hard earth on which I had fallen? What could this soft smooth substance on which I appeared now to be resting be? Again I opened my eyes. Whose glance was that that met mine? Those were not the eyes,—that was not the face,—of the demon who had been whirling me round and round, and bearing me with him down into lowest depths! It was a friendly face, it was good and kind enough to be the face of some good angel who had rescued me.'

“‘What is this? Where am I?’ Some one asked the questions. Could it be myself? Could the curious feeble voice that came out laboriously, as though it had been an old man clambering a steep mountain on a foggy day,—could it be my voice?

“Some one bowed himself down to listen; my good angel, as it seemed to me once more! And then, with foreign accent, in gentle friendly tones, the questions were answered.

“‘You are quite safe. We shall do now, I see quite well. We shall take care of you,

and bring you round quite soon. I have seen to the wound in the side. It is not very serious. But you are not well. You have got this nasty fever. We shall soon bring you round. Let me feel the pulses once more. Now I shall leave you with this good fellow. He will get you inside the bed, and I will come again and bring some medicine. Where is the good fellow? I must ring.'

"The good fellow? What good fellow? I could think of no good fellow but Denham. I remember saying,—as one remembers words spoken in a dream, 'How is he? I must go to him.'

"I was soon to learn who the good fellow was.

"Ah,—mon bon Jean! Bien!' said my new friend,—the Martigny medical man,—to the person who answered the bell.

"Another low colloquy in French went on, and I caught the words, 'L'autre monsieur.' 'Il s'apporte mieux à present. Il est bien, —*bien* resolu;' and finally, 'Bon soir.' 'Bon soir, monsieur.' 'Au revoir.'

"Then I was sensible, for a moment, of a

very kind and gentle presence close to my bed-side, and, looking up, I saw a countenance which might give any man in sickness or trouble, confidence and consolation. It was the countenance of Jean, the guide. It seemed to appear for a moment, and then to disappear. I suppose, in fact, I must have fainted while they were getting me to bed. I remember a moment afterwards, when it seemed to me as if I had got into a haven of rest. I remember seeing, in what appeared like a dream, the face of Denham, white as death, looking down upon me. But after that, for a long while, all was blank as regarded my actual surroundings; or I was only vaguely conscious of voices about me, and kind, even tender and brotherly attentions; while, for the most part, I seemed to be tumbling head-foremost over precipices, or being dragged against pointed stones slowly, slowly, up some interminable mountain; or to be seeing Margaret in danger, far away out of my reach; or to hear Denham calling for help, and to struggle in vain to find, or to feel, his gentle, kindly touch, and

to know that he was leading me to Margaret, and then to find his hand grow deadly cold, his grasp relax, and to lose him for ever from my sight!

“ ‘What has happened, Jean?’ I said at last, one day, when, looking up, I saw my faithful attendant seated by my bed-side.

“ ‘Ah, monsieur has been very, very ill. But monsieur will do now; *monsieur le medecin* says so. But monsieur must not talk; *monsieur le medecin* says so.’

“ ‘But how do you come to be here, then, Jean?’

“ ‘Ah, by the mercy of the good God, and the Blessed Virgin! It was a miracle that brought me to the side of monsieur, in time to save him! And now monsieur must forgive me, but I cannot and will not leave him until he is well.’

“Tears were in the poor fellow’s eyes as he spoke, and I am ashamed to say,—however no matter as to that.

“ ‘Rather you must forgive me, Jean,’ I returned,—and my voice seemed so small and weak to me while I continued my answer,

that I almost fancied myself a little child appealing to a beloved nurse,—‘you must forgive me, Jean, for I cannot let you leave me at all! Why not stay and be my friend and servant always? I cannot do without you, Jean.’

“And so, after a little more talk, we entered into a compact, Jean became my servant, and never man had a better or more faithful one.

“Having received no satisfactory answers to my inquiries after Denham, ‘But you have told me nothing about my friend, yet, Jean!’ I said, presently. ‘You say you hope he has taken a turn for the better; but that was long ago! He ought surely to be well by this time!’

“‘Ah, perhaps he will be well soon. But monsieur must not talk.’

“‘Yes, Jean, I mean to talk until you have told me more about my friend,’ I said. ‘Has he been worse?’”

“‘Ah, monsieur, he is better now.’

“‘What threw him back?’ I asked, impatiently. ‘Tell me all about him, Jean?’”

“ ‘Ah, monsieur would not let me tell. Pardon, monsieur; monsieur must ask the other monsieur when he is well? ’

“ ‘I thought I saw him by my bedside, when I first began to be ill, Jean,’ I said; ‘was it true? Did he harm himself by getting up from his sick bed to attend upon me? ’

“ ‘Ah, monsieur, he did more than that!’ Here tears filled again the good fellow’s eyes! ‘The *medecin* and the other monsieur will be very angry with me; but I cannot help it; but monsieur must not agitate himself, he must lie quiet, and I will tell him everything.’

“ Jean’s ‘everything’ proved to be very little, although enough to give me to understand that Denham, in utter self-forgetfulness, had risked his own life in trying to save mine. The *medecin* coming in, put me under strict orders which debarred me from further questioning, and it was not until I was on the fair road to recovery that I received all particulars about my poor friend’s heroic efforts for my sake.

“ It appears that no sooner had I left him,

than he began to trouble himself about my ill looks. ‘Here am I, making myself an invalid, burdening Meredith with my duties, whereas I’m really strong enough for anything, and I believe I am killing him. He is in for an attack of illness,—what a fool I was to allow him to go for that walk! Some harm will come to him! I shall get up and go after him, if he does not return soon; I am quite strong enough!’

“Such were his crazy thoughts, and he lay bothering himself, until presently the garçon, looking in, discovered him out of bed, getting his writing-case! He soon found himself obliged to give up his attempt at letter writing, however, but on learning from the garçon that a certain amount of vague alarm was felt on my account, must needs dress himself, when the garçon was out of hearing, and with extraordinary energy, from excitement acting the part of strength, make his way downstairs and out of doors towards the Tête-Noire. Jean, in company with a raving gentleman (who did not like losing the guide who, without rhyme

or reason, as it appeared, said he could not keep his engagement and must lose his job and forfeit his reward), overtook him, looking 'as if he had risen dead from his grave,' and, half mad on account of delay, let out something of the errand upon which he was bent; whereupon Denham promised all manner of payment to the new, — doubtfully forthcoming, — guide, recommended despairingly by Jean, and to Jean himself, — and it ended in the puzzled gentleman amicably helping the now half-fainting Denham back to the hotel, and his bed-room, and calling in the doctor; who was luckily, accordingly, at hand, when Jean returned with me whom he had rescued. Of course an access of fever was the consequence of Denham's imprudence; but he had not learnt from it consideration for himself! — insisted on rising, ill though he was, to attend upon me, — was up all night with me, and half the next day, declaring that Jean would be worn out, and there would be no one to nurse me, if he did not give his assistance! Poor fellow! before many hours of that day had past, his

strength had completely given out; they put him to bed, he had a serious relapse, and for weeks was in worse danger than I was myself. *Monsieur le medecin* had hardly thought it possible that he could again rally; and of all the marvellous events that happened to us, his recovery appears to me the most unaccountable !

“Now, Mrs. Willoughby, if you will allow me, I will ring the bell and ask for Jean. He is with me at the Hall, and I ventured to tell him to join me here this morning. I should like you to hear from himself the account of his own experience. May I ring to inquire if he has arrived? ”

“Pray do,” returned Mrs. Willoughby, and then after the few words which her full heart would allow her to speak, she left the room to look in upon Margaret, and see if all was going well with her. She quickly returned with a brighter look upon her face.

“Mr. Thomas is with her still,” she said, in answer to Charles Grantham’s eager glance of inquiry. “I opened the door so gently that they did not hear me. But I feel

better satisfied since I have taken this peep at her.”

And now entered Jean, with his pleasant, honest, and intelligent face, and well-knit muscular and agile-looking figure.

“Now then, Jean,” said his master, after certain introductory passages,—“now, then, fire away, Jean;—in English, you understand. He talks capital English, I must tell you, Mrs. Willoughby. Now begin your part of the story.”

“Ah, the master has been so good and brave and unfortunate,” began Jean.

“Never mind about all that, Jean. We will take a certain amount of flattery for granted, if you will begin on solid ground, beginning, I mean, you know, with the night on the Croix de Fer.”

“Ah, it was a bad day, that day when the two gentlemen lost their way on the Croix de Fer!” went on Jean. “The same day, the other gentleman, Mr. Miles Grantham, arrived at the hotel. I had been with a monsieur to Martigny, and on returning, fell in with Pierre and his gentleman, in the

midst of the mist. An accident might have happened to any of us, and I trembled when I heard that the two gentlemen were missing. I remembered then the cries that we had heard on the Chemin. Those cries, madam, which I had thought to come from the poor soul in Purgatory, of the man who was killed once, long ago, on the Croix de Fer, must, I knew now, have been the cries of the gentlemen who had gone out that day; and I determined that I would go in their aid. I prepared myself and got ready all things which I thought might be necessary, and took my torch. Then I heard that Pierre and his gentleman were going. I was surprised, for I *knew* Pierre, and I did not like the look of Mr. Miles Grantham. I proposed that Pierre and I should go alone, and so save the weak gentleman the trouble. But they told me I was not wanted, and the gentleman was determined to go and search for his dear friends. I saw them look at each other. I overheard words which showed me they did not mean well to the poor lost gentlemen. I let them go,—but soon fol-

lowed after them. By-and-by the light of their torch went out. I heard the gentleman swear; he tried to light it, but Pierre had an accident and let it fall; and I came up with my light, and they were obliged to permit me to walk with them. I heard them speak in whispers. I knew they were making their plans. But they dared not lay hands on me; and the gentlemens should be safe while I was near to these méchants. By-and-by a—what you call—a sudden blow of wind came and knocked out the light of my torch; and then it was all a grope, grope, in the dark, for a long, long time; but the wind blew away the mist, and the moon came out, and it was all clear and *tres beau*,—ah, beautiful! I knew, then, that the Blessed Virgin was on my side, and the side of the poor lost gentlemens.”

“Don’t be all day, Jean, with your account,” put in his master here. “We are in a hurry. Make haste!”

“Ah, I will be quick, sir; but I must tell you that I heard these méchants whispering, when they thought I was too far off to catch

their wicked words. I heard the monsieur say he must make the best of it, and wait his time, and he promised great things to Pierre, and held up great heaps of gold pieces before his eyes ; and I heard him say he would keep his eyes open, and do all that the monsieur wished done. And then I came up with them, and we heard the calls, and they changed their voices,—and we all went down together, as though we had been of one heart. And then——”

“ Ah, we know all the rest of this part, Jean,” interrupted his master. “ Tell us now,—why did you not make known to me what you had discovered—about the plot that these same méchants were hatching ? ”

“ Ah, sir, you know,—I have told you,—you must forgive me ! ”

“ Yes, but Mrs. Willoughby does not know.”

“ Ah, madame, it was so hard ! Pierre was at once my friend and my enemy. I could not tell of him ; and I thought, ‘ It may be a mistake. They may not be so bad as I think. I will watch. They shall not

hurt the poor gentlemens.' I was angry when I thought of Pierre. I could have killed him many a time myself; but the Blessed Virgin would not let me. And *her* name, too, was Marie! His wife would have married me, madame, and loved me, too; but he stole her heart from me. Poor Marie! Ah, she would have loved me well! And when I thought of her, and her children, I could not be cruel to Pierre. But I kept open my eyes. It was easy, for I was backwards and forwards. I did not dwell in any chalêt of my own,—for I was all alone. I was ready to be guide or *porteur-de-chaise*, or *domestique temporaire à l'hôtel*, or at the Pension Col de Balme,—or at Chamounix, Argentière, or Martigny. It was all the same. Mr. Miles stayed long at Chamounix, though the weather was cold and bad. He often came to the Col de Balme, when my master knew nothing of it, and to Martigny, and he was continuellement in compagnie with Pierre; and I many times overheard them ask questions about *les messieurs*. At last, one day at The Cygne,

I heard the *maitre d'hôtel* say to Mr. Miles, 'The malade is better,—your friend is quite cheerful. He is going to walk, quite long way.' Pierre had come with him, and he was standing about talking to the garçons, and I knew he was watching for the gentleman,—my master, as now is. Well,—I met my master, and I prayed of him not to go up,—I warned him; but I could not explain. I had seen Marie that morning, and I had promised her that I would be a friend to her husband, all the more that he was my enemy. I tried once more to think that I had been mistaken, but determined to be watchful. I had to go back to The Cygne on business, but as soon as I could, I followed after my master. Ah, it was dreadful! I felt, while I went as fast as I could up the mountain, 'Ah, he may be *kilt*, he may be *kilt*, before I can get to him!' At last I heard the gun go off with a dreadful noise; and then I heard it again and again, and I said, 'Ah, I am too late!' And I thought I must kill myself. But the Blessed Virgin came and lifted me, and carried me all in one moment

up to the spot where my master lay helpless and wounded, and,—ah, madam!—it *was* a moment! the méchant was upon him! He was about to fire again. One little instant, and my dear master would have been a dead man! But in that moment I was strong,—strong like ten thousand men. I put out my hand,—the good God was with me!—and with one effort I pulled Pierre off my master, and knocked him down with a great blow, and he fell and was stunned. I thought he was dead,—I did not care then. I had saved the dear monsieur. It turned out, after all, that he was not dead. The *gens-d'armes* went up and took him, and he was put in prison, and punished very heavy. I was sorry for poor Marie, but it could not be helped. I had talked to Pierre and warned him, and I would have kept him from doing the wickedness, and from his wicked heart being known to the gentleman. But it could not be helped. Ah, my poor Marie! If he could repent and die it would be the best thing for her!”

“It would, Jean,” interposed his master,

but be quicker with your story,—there's a good fellow."

"Pardon, madame,—I will be quick, sir," went on Jean. "What to do with the poor gentleman who was so hurt in the side, and was all fainting,—and so ill I thought he must be dying,—was the thing next to think of. I tried, as gently as I could, to part carry and part drag him down, until at last some one came by, and him I got to help me,—and we took him to the hotel, and I got him on to the bed, and *monsieur le medecin* came to him, and the other gentleman, who was half dying, would come and nurse him like a brother. And for a long, long time we thought he would die, but at last he did get better."

"There, that will do, Jean," said his master, quickly, here. "You may go, I will tell the remainder of the story myself."

"It was a long time before Denham or I was able to stir hand or foot. At length Denham, almost against *monsieur le medecin's* orders, contrived to write a short note to his sisters, saying, 'I have been ill, but

am recovering. I hope soon to be in England.' And I soon afterwards wrote briefly to the Merediths, mentioning that I had been ill, and sending the letter to the last place at which I had known them to be. It reached them, I have since discovered, after making a long and circuitous route, a few hours before I reached them myself.

"As soon as we were fit to move, while still very weak, the doctor encouraged us to leave Martigny. If we travelled by short and easy stages,—with Jean to take all trouble and responsibility off our hands,—he felt sure, he said, that, under all the circumstances, change of air would now be our best restorative. And we were only too ready to take his advice.

"We started on a still, sunny December day, well wrapped up in the warmest coats and plaids which the town of Martigny afforded. We reached Lausanne by mid-day, and there made a halt. Jean conveyed us to our bed-rooms at our hotel there, and insisted upon bringing up our meals to us, instead of allowing us to undergo the

fatigue of *table d'hôte*. But the next morning we rebelled, and declaring ourselves quite fit to breakfast down-stairs, betook ourselves, soon after ten a.m., to the *salle-à-manger*.

“ ‘Why,’ exclaimed Denham, as we entered the room, there is Fletcher!’ ”

“ And he walked off at a tolerably brisk pace for an invalid, to the upper end of the *table d'hôte*,—where indeed was seated our friend Sir Thomas Fletcher, I following in his train.

“ As Denham approached, Fletcher rose, stared, and stood for a moment as though dumb-founded.

“ ‘Denham!’ he cried, at last,—‘ Denham! Is it you or your double? Why, all the world imagines you to be wandering at the other side of the world,—if not in Jupiter or the moon,—with your brother; and I have been dreaming of you as having been eaten up by wild beasts or cannibals!’ ”

“ He spoke quickly and nervously, but was evidently as much overjoyed as he was amazed. Before, however, he had recovered from his first amazement, his eyes suddenly turned upon me,—

“ ‘Meredith!’ he gasped,—‘MEREDITH! no, it *must* be his ghost! Are both the fellows ghosts? Can’t you speak, man?—one of you? Meredith? What, were you not killed with your friends on the Flégère?’

“ Then I heard the sad story which you are acquainted with; and mutual explanations were given.

“ ‘I fell in with Miles Grantham and his wife, the other day,’ said Fletcher, presently. ‘He gave me to understand that not the shadow of a doubt remained of your having perished with the other three.’

“ ‘Ah!’ I put in, with a sort of laugh, ‘did he?’

“ ‘Ah!’ echoed Fletcher, ‘he did! And he is anxiously looking out for the moment which will make him Sir Miles Grantham; though I suppose he is a little doubtful as to how much fortune may come to him with the title, as he appears to be doing his best to make one at Homburg.’

There were allusions in this answer which were Hindoostanee to me, for I had not learnt what I know now; but I hardly

heeded them in my eagerness on one subject.

“ ‘Where is he now?’ I asked, hastily.

“ ‘I believe at Homburg; but he talked of going elsewhere, shortly.’

“ ‘Denham,—see to the breakfast, will you?’ I said. ‘I must go to look up trains, and order Jean to get my bag ready. I shall be off to Homburg, post haste, without stopping anywhere, if possible.’

“ ‘My dear fellow, are you mad?’ cried Denham. ‘All the way to Homburg? You know what the doctor said about over exertion, and easy stages.’

“ ‘Confound the doctor! Hang easy stages!’ I exclaimed, as I hurried to make my arrangements.

“ ‘I have barely ten minutes for breakfast,’ I said, returning shortly to the *salle-d-manger*. My train for Berne starts in half an hour. Jean is under the impression that he goes with me, but I shall have to undeceive him. He goes with you and the luggage to Fribourg, and I return to these parts, and join you at Fribourg,

as soon as I have done my business in Germany.'

" 'I beg your pardon ; if you are bent upon going to perdition, I go with you,' said Denham, ' and no doubt Jean will be of the same resolution.'

" ' You will both find it perdition if you do,' I answered, rising from the table. ' Good-bye, old fellow, for a couple of days or so. Take care of yourself. Where is Fletcher gone to, by-the-by? '

" ' He is off to Montreux, to join his people, who are about to be on the wing again. The climate does not suit his mother, and they are going to Italy for the winter.'

" ' I meant to have *reminded* him that we were in the land of the living, if he was writing to England !' I returned. ' Probably, in some scatter-brain mood, he will forget that we were ever supposed to be otherwise ! However, you will be writing home. I have not time for a line, until I have settled this matter ! '

" Denham plainly thought I was out of my senses.

“ ‘Good-bye, then, if you *will* be a martyr to revenge,’ he answered, with uplifted eyebrows. ‘Don’t let Miles stiletto you, that’s all!’

“ ‘Miles Grantham and his wife! His wife! Who was his wife? Alice Craycroft, of course,—it could be no one else!’ That it was Alice Craycroft, I had taken for granted, when Fletcher told me the news. It had not even occurred to me to ask the question. But now,—‘Miles Grantham and his wife! Who is his wife? Who is his wife?’ asked the dash, dash, onwards, onwards, rush, rush, of the train which Denham had informed me was about to take me to perdition. ‘Alice Craycroft, of course,’ answered my heart; but again the question came from the train, ‘Who is his wife? Who is his wife?’ ‘Alice Craycroft, of course! Any other notion is preposterous,’ I answered again. ‘Who is his wife? who is his wife?’

“How did the question arise? Why did it arise? Why should I feel that absurd, unfounded, ridiculous agony? *Was* it unfounded? Was it ridiculous? Was not

Miles a liar? Might he not have lied to me about Alice Craycroft? Might he not have told any amount of stories at Grantham? Might not that mad woman——”

Here Charles Grantham paused suddenly in his narrative, covered with confusion. He had forgotten that it was a narrative,—that he was not actually living an experience over again!

But Mrs. Willoughby only looked up with a quiet smile. “*I was mad,*” she said.

“*I was mad,*” went on Charles. “I hardly know what I thought,—what preposterous questions I propounded to myself. My brain seemed all on fire! I was weak and excited. Thought and feeling ran away with me. What had first entered my mind as a preposterous notion, had at length fixed itself in my imagination as an undoubted fact. I was in the state of mind and body in which a man might suddenly, all un-awares, find himself down amongst the list of murderers!

“I arrived at Homburg the following morning; fortified myself with breakfast,

and went in search of the hotel where Fletcher had told me he had met with Miles. A miserable haggard man,—with such an expression on his face as a painter might have delineated on the countenance of a lost spirit, in a picture of '*L'Inferno*,'—was coming down the door-steps of this hotel, as I was ascending them.

“ ‘Miles!’ I exclaimed.

“ Did my voice sound in his ears, as the voice of the Judge might sound in the ears of the inhabitants of '*L'Inferno*'? ‘Miles?’

“ Ah, the expression that crossed his almost livid features, as though of some horror of surprise, at a new revelation, of a new and unlooked-for fall into a lower misery than he had dreamed of yet!—who could depict it? Ah, the cry,—the yell of despairing agony and rage that he gave!—who could find words to describe it?

“ ‘Why art thou come to torment me, before my time?’ He surely did not speak the words; but it seems, to me as I look back upon that terrible instant, when I stood before him whom I had been madly dream-

ing of as Margaret's husband,—it seems to me that, as I thought of Margaret, my Margaret, and believed myself inspired to avenge her wrongs,—that that was the meaning which the demoniacal yell I have spoken of, took, as it fell upon my hearing.

“ ‘Who are you?’ he shrieked. ‘What are you come for? Who brought you from the dead again?’ ”

“ I saw then that he was not himself. Had he been drinking, or had some money loss, some misery, driven him out of his mind? The eyes which were usually turned furtively away from those whom he addressed, now looked sharply up at me, and remained gazing into my face, with a long fixed, lingering glare.

“ I know not what answer my eyes returned to his, but for a while an answering look was the only reply that I gave! At length, in tones as calm and as bitterly calm as I could make them,—

“ ‘I have come,’ I said, ‘to accuse you of murder; to punish you for treachery.’ ”

“ With a wild shriek, almost before the

words were out of my mouth, he turned and fled,—fled from the ghost of his evil deeds, come, as he thought, to torment him before his time ! On, on, he went, down the steps, along the street,—on, ever on, ever on, I following after, without a touch of pity in my heart for him,—without a touch of pity for my own fast-failing strength and breath ! On, ever on, until at last, for an instant, he turned a death-like face !—he turned, he reeled, he fell ! He fell,—and where he fell he lay still, and I came up to where he was, and saw him fainting on the ground, without a touch of pity in my heart. We were close to a hotel. Some one helped me to carry him in. I asked for a room and some water. ‘Should they send for a doctor?’ I was asked. ‘No, I am a doctor,’ I replied, ‘I will bring him round.’

“ ‘Ah,—he is dying, he is almost dead,’ I heard them whisper one to another ; and they glanced pityingly at me, who had to lose a friend whom I loved,—they thought,—‘perhaps a brother !’

“ I waved them all off. I shut and locked

the door. He and I were alone! He was in my power. I might put him out of the way without leaving any signs of violence behind. No one would suspect me of having murdered him whom they supposed to be my dying friend! I looked at him without a touch of pity in my heart!

“But the account I had to settle with him must be settled face to face with him on earth. I sprinkled water on his face, and soon brought him round by the usual means. He looked up bewilderingly, with a terror-struck and yet vindictive look.

“‘Have you brought me to hell?’ he muttered. ‘Well,—at least *you*, too, are dead! The devil did that matter for me well. I owe him faithful service for it. *You* will not get the property you robbed me of! *You* will never be the baronet and squire of Grantham Hall. *You* will never have the Margaret whose heart you drew away from me!’

“‘What is the use of raving in this way, Miles?’ I said, firmly, determined to bring him to his senses, for I perceived that he had

been playing all manner of tricks with his nervous system, and was giving himself up without a struggle to the fancies by which his nerves were over-mastering him. ‘What do you mean by this humbug?’ I went on, gruffly. ‘You know well enough that if you are in any a hell, it is a hell upon earth, and that I, whom you tried to murder, am come to bring you to your punishment!’

“‘Murder? What do you mean? How dare you?’ he cried, starting up, and breaking out into impotent rage.

“‘I mean just this,’ I returned, ‘that you shall confess what you did, and why you did it, or it shall be the worse for you. Remember you are altogether in my power!’

“‘And how comes it that you are not dead?’ in a londly-weak scream of angry desperation, he cried. ‘What did that confounded villain mean by lying to me?—telling me, when I went to see him in prison, that he had left you as good as dead?—that the doctor— By heaven, the scoundrel shall suffer for his pains!’

“‘Do you dare to name the Name of

Heaven?’ I asked, sternly. ‘Do *you* complain of being lied to?—*you*, whose whole life has been nothing but a lie? The poor wretch you speak of, whom you led into farther wickedness, has got his deserts,—and now is the time to think of *your* reward,—not his.’

“ ‘And I paid him half his hire-money, and he dared to murmur because I left the remainder until I should have made more money! Villain! He should not have had a sous if I had known that he was lying to me! Oh, how I have been fooled!—how I have been fooled!’ went on Miles, as though speaking to himself, in a shrill, quavering tone of complaint. ‘Ah!’ and he rose up suddenly, contorting and twisting his face as one might who quivers from the pain of a blow in a place already sore, ‘Ah! if I had had the money, last night, that I threw away on that liar, it might have saved me, I might have been spared this overthrow,—all might have been well! As it is, all is lost,—lost, lost,—unlucky beggar that I am! Everything fails me,—everything, everything, everywhere, everyway! To

think that I should have been so fooled, so fooled, so fooled ! ’

“ He moved hastily across the room and back again, as he spoke, beating his hands together, while the passionate treble of his tones rose higher and higher, until at length they ended in a prolonged shrill hysterical cry. And the cry might have been prolonged or encored, with variations, until Domesday ! But putting my hand, at this point, on his arm, and drawing him down on to the chair that he had left,—

“ ‘ Stop that noise,’ I said. ‘ Be quiet. Listen to the questions I have to ask you, and answer them.’

“ Immediately his tone changed.

“ ‘ You little know how hard upon a fellow you are,’ he whimpered. ‘ If I had not been such an unlucky dog from beginning to end, I should not have done it. You have robbed me of everything ! You have all,—and I have nothing,—nothing,—every thing lost, lost ! ’

“ ‘ Do you dare to complain ? ’ I answered, very sternly, for his words, believing what I

did about him, had stung me to the quick, and I looked upon his misery still without a touch of pity in my heart. ‘Do *you* dare to complain of ill-fortune, who have been a curse in the fortunes of others?—who have been as a poisonous serpent creeping through the lives of your betters? Do you dare to add the sin of complaint to the sin of which the punishment is ripe?’

“ ‘You are confoundedly hard upon me; you might have pity,’ he answered, fretfully. ‘I’m not selfish, I never was a selfish man,—it is not only myself, it is my wife,—my poor wife must suffer too! My poor wife,—I left her all alone, starving at the hotel!’ He spoke in the whining, wheedling tones of an importunate beggar. I winced. The wretch had contrived to hit with his poisoned arrow right into the raw of my sorest point. Did he see? Did he feel that he had a powerful weapon in his hand?—that I was weak, failing,—fainting beneath his baleful words?

“He should not feel it! With strong effort I controlled myself.

“ ‘She shall not suffer!’ I broke in, suddenly, with a loud burst of indignation. ‘She shall not suffer! To strike you dead where you stand would be my best way of delivering her from suffering.’

“ ‘I saw the coward shrink and tremble, and turn a shade paler as I spoke.

“ ‘She would suffer, *then*,’ he whined, piteously; she loves me, she would die if she were to lose me. My poor Alice!’

“ ‘What had he said? What had happened to me? How came it that by the utterance of a single word, the wretch had transported me all in a second from the depths of misery into the highest heights of bliss,—into some more than earthly Paradise? What was I seeing? What was I hearing, while the miserable creature seated before me went on with his wheedling, whining cries for mercy? What had filled the dingy room with sudden radiance? in the midst of which I saw, not the objects which its walls contained, but,—some one far away and yet present with me!—some one with a face all full of love and tenderness, and beautiful as,—as the face of

Margaret,—as itself! Whose voice was calling to me, and telling me that she was mine, and mine alone,—and bidding me come and claim her as my own? At length, I say ‘at length,’ and yet only a few moments may have passed, for I had been living where time cannot enter to touch and leave its mark,—at length a thought in connection with the abject reptile who was crawling at my feet flashed across my mind, and I turned suddenly to look down at him from the height of my bliss. I turned and looked at him, at last, with a touch of pity in my heart!

“ ‘They were true those words that he had said, true in fact, however falsely spoken! It was true that I had ‘all’ and he had nothing,—nothing! It was true that I held, in strong hope, all that any man on earth could desire in the way of earthly,—nay more than earthly bliss! If his winnings at play had been ten million millions of pounds, and I had possessed but a penny in the world,—still those words of his would have been true! Feeling this, I looked

down at him where he knelt,—rather crouched,—at my feet; I looked at the abject misery of his mean countenance, I listened to his abject cry for mercy,—and there came and grew a touch of pity for him in my heart.

“ ‘*Why*, then,’ I said, speaking the wondering thought that had suddenly entered my head,—‘*why*, then, did you try to murder me? What did you trouble yourself to try to get rid of me for?’ ”

“ ‘You don’t know how hard pressed I have been,—how things have gone against me,’—he began, in his piteous, wheedling tones. ‘If you would only have pity on me and save me from my misery, I——’ ”

“ ‘Answer my question,’ I broke in, once more, sternly and determinedly; ‘when you have made full confession, and given full explanation, then it will be time enough for me to begin to think of pity. Why did you try to murder me?—ANSWER!’ ”

“ ‘Because,’—starting to his feet, he bellowed out his answer in sudden furious rage,—‘because,—because you are the son

of my uncle, Sir John Grantham,—heir to the baronetcy,—heir to all the property !’

“All was clear now ! You may imagine the effect upon me of the news which had fallen thus suddenly as a thunder-bolt ! I believe at first I was fairly stunned by utter amazement,—and it was long before I could take in the fact, *as* a fact. It slowly crept into my mind, making its way at once as a joy and a sorrow, and as a clearing up of mystery and enigma,—while he told me,—now once more upon his knees, the abject, miserable suer for mercy,—while he told me all the story of his treachery, interlarding it with a thousand excuses, selfish apologies, and reasons why I should spare him. At length,—

“‘I owe you restitution for having cheated you out of a robbery,’ I said ; ‘what are your debts ?’

“‘Lend me the money,—only lend me the money, and I will win back all that I have lost, and make a fortune into the bargain !’ he cried, starting up once more, while renewed hope and energy gleamed in

the eyes which in his eagerness he turned full upon me; self-consciousness being lost, for once, in the passionate love of gambling.

“ ‘Not a penny,’ I replied, ‘not a farthing will I lend you. What are your debts?’ ”

“Whereupon, recovering his lately-dropped maudlin tone of self-pity, he began to catalogue, for my benefit, a long list of difficulties and misfortunes, into which by pure ill-luck, and no fault of his own, he had fallen! And having at length made myself master of his more immediate entanglements, ‘I will do this for you,’ I began, ‘I will undertake to make myself answerable for those ‘debts of honour’ by which you may be pleased to consider yourself bound at present, a prisoner to the gaming tables of Homburg! I will discharge your hotel expenses, I—’ But here I abruptly paused, confounded by a recollection which had suddenly presented itself to my mind, and told me that I was making myself very generously free with other people’s money! For if Miles’ astounding news was true,—if it was no drunkard’s dream,—what right had I to the use of the

allowance hitherto mine, by the unconscious bounty of my supposed father? What right had I to take for granted a sufficient allowance from my newly-found father, to enable me justly to make myself liable for any of Miles' debts? What did I possess that I could fairly call my own? I had earned a mere trifle, by my profession, and scarcely more by literary work. Was I on the verge of committing a fraud in the cause of Quixotism? For answer, I told myself that it was morally certain that I should find myself possessed of sufficient means to enable me to help my wretched and disappointed cousin,—if such he was,—and should be a wretch myself, if I withheld from *such* a wretch my pity; and if seeming 'moral certainty' should prove a falsity, after all, at all events I could put my shoulder to the wheel and work for money, as I had hitherto worked for delight, and thus discharge the debt that I should have incurred. I decided to listen to this latter argument. Was I right or was I wrong?"

"You were right, as I have said," broke

in Sir John Grantham here. "You were right to obey the instinct which must have told you you might trust your father, my boy."

"Well, rightly or wrongly, after a few moments' pause,—for there are times when thought works its problems at a rate which keeps it from becoming apparent to those with whom you are talking, that the problematical work is going on,—after a few moments' pause, I continued,—

" "I will pay your passage money, and the passage money of your wife and her maid, to America,—to Australia,—to any place in the new world that you like,—provided you leave Europe by the first ship sailing from any port in Holland. I will go farther. I will myself make inquiries, and write to engage berths for you, and will give to your wife sufficient money for immediate use, enough to keep you both and your servant honestly from starvation."

"Something like a real glimmer of hope, a genuine wish to begin a truer life, flitted for an instant across his features. Something

like a real expression of gratitude crossed his lips.

“And so I may take my leave of my cousin Miles, and say no more of this part of my story, but that I kept my promise, and hope that he and his wife are keeping the promises that they made to me, and are voyaging in safety to the Dutch colony for which the ship they were to embark in was bound.

“After refreshment and a night’s rest, I started, with my new thoughts and my new hopes,—and my new assurances that life had suddenly turned from sickness and trouble into overwhelming joy,—I started on my journey back to Fribourg. I waited for confirmation of the wonderful news, which seemed as yet almost too wonderful to be true, before writing a line to England. At Fribourg I found letters awaiting me, which gave me this confirmation. I found, also, Denham in renewed health and strength, ready to take the homeward-bound journey on the morning after my return to Fribourg. He and Jean refused absolutely to allow me to leave them again, in order

that I might travel post haste, while they followed at a more dignified and invalid-like pace. I was looking like a ghost, they said, and should be one before I could reach my friends, if they were not at hand to look after me. So we all arrived in England together yesterday. Then we parted: he making for his sisters' house, and I for Grantham; sleeping on the road, last night, at my—at the Merediths', who had received my latest letter an hour or two before they received me, and coming on here by an early train this morning."

A pause of eloquent silence, a few half-inaudible exclamations, a few minutes' conversation, with questions and answers and remarks, followed upon Charles Grantham's narrative, after which,—

"Now Mrs. Willoughby, you will be glad to get rid of us, that you may go up to the sick room," said Sir John, rising from his chair; "and Charles, you and I must return to your mother,—eh?—or she will begin to think that we have both been spirited away to the mists on the mountains! What?"

Ah,—I expected some sort of negative! A rebellious son, at the very beginning, you see, Mrs. Willoughby!”

But Charles had not spoken a word of objection, he had only looked a look, which his two companions easily divined.

“You will stay until Mr. Thomas comes down, will not you? He cannot be long now,” said Mrs. Willoughby, putting aside her own agony of longing to be alone with her thoughts for a few minutes before going to her child. “I might venture, I know, to leave you, if I wished to go to her; but I would rather wait here until he comes down to tell us about her. It is not as if *you* were not caring too! Oh,—I wonder what he has said to her, and how she has borne it!” she concluded, the words coming out almost in a sigh below her breath.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT had he told her? How had she borne it? This chapter must give an answer to the questions, by taking us back nearly to the beginning of the dreaded interview between Mr. Thomas and his patient.

“Well, we must put all our heads together, and all our shoulders to the wheel, to try to get you better,” said Mr. Thomas, after his medical examination was over.

Margaret’s answer was a curious look and smile,—half amused and half sad. She could not but know that her doctor had for some time looked upon her case as a very hopeless one.

“You think I am humbugging you, I see?” added Mr. Thomas. “But indeed you are mistaken! I mean what I say.”

“You think that I may recover, after all?” said Margaret, in a tone of surprise, while a strange mingling of sensations made her feeble heart beat fast and painfully. She had so completely put aside the thought of recovery,—as an impossibility,—that to have it brought before her again, thus suddenly, as possible,—to be told that the immediate hope of that fuller life by which death was to be swallowed up in victory, by which all her energies were to be restored and quickened, by which the Power of Love was to be newly realized and felt, might no longer be hers,—to be told that by means of a hard struggle with death, she might be restored to the imperfection of existence on earth,—brought to her spirit a sensation analogous to that said to be felt by a drowning man, as he awakens from dreams of Elysium, to find himself battling painfully for life. But Margaret’s had been no mere selfish dream of Elysium. The thought that he whom she loved best was soon to be visibly by her side, moving and working with her, that *with him* she was to grow in

knowledge, reverence, and love, had indeed formed a great part of the joy to which she had been looking,—and which had seemed to be fast overtaking her. But consideration for her mother had not been absent from her dreams of blessedness,—or rather from her faith in the Power of that unseen Love which was blessing her even then. ‘I shall no longer be a burden and anxiety to mother,’ she had thought; ‘I shall soothe and comfort her instead!’ For she was strong in her belief that Love’s conquest would be,—was,—complete! Moreover, besides those seasons when the unseen Life of Love stirred her into strong hope and joyful expectation, there had been times when the ‘burden of the flesh’ had weighed her down utterly, and she had been able to realize nothing beyond it and the relief which the tender thoughtfulness of those about her brought;—and at the close of such times, there had come over her longings to be well again, that she might prove her love and gratitude for her mother, while she was on earth. Was there, after all, a chance that this fond

wish might be fulfilled? The very thought of the bare possibility that it might be so, brought a glad and thankful thrill to mingle with her bitter pain. Life would be altered,—sad,—shorn of its brightest earthly hopes,—but full of Love, and Peace, and Blessedness, and sweet and tender uses, and bright with its many gleams of heavenly light! glad with its songs of “sure and certain hope!”

But ah,—it surely was out of the question! It could not, could not be! How was the life that had already left her to return? Was any Prophet at hand, to come as a messenger of new life from the Almighty? Would the Son of God appear to speak the words,—“Maiden, I say unto thee arise?” Then indeed there might be hope of a restoration to physical strength for her! But as it was,—

“You think that I may recover, after all?” she said, in a tone of surprise and incredulity.

“I have a better hope than I had when I saw you yesterday,” returned Mr. Thomas.

“I have been talking about you with the new physician whom we want you to see, and he——”

“Another doctor!” cried Margaret, with a laughing grimace, in a tone of good-humoured complaint, and with a movement that made her faint and breathless all in an instant. “Another doctor! I hoped you were going to cure me all by yourself,” she panted out, feebly, but laughingly.

“You must be quiet, and not exert yourself unnecessarily, or neither of us will be able to do you any good,” said Mr. Thomas, gravely, after making her swallow a restorative, and after a minute’s silence, while she somewhat recovered herself. “I see, Miss Willoughby, you are not ‘too good to live,’ at all events,” he added, veiling under a light manner the deep anxiety which he felt concerning her.

“I don’t want any more doctors! One is quite enough!” said Margaret.

“I hope you will change your mind with regard to this one, however; I have great confidence in him and his opinion,—I feel, in

short, that he has brought new life with him for you, and I am quite sure that you will like him. But the struggle into life out of such weakness as yours will be very hard for you, my dear. It will require great courage; I have something to tell you which may make you feel it better worth your while to enter the battle."

Margaret looked up wonderingly, and he saw her face working painfully,—

"You think, then," she began, putting aside her wonder,—

But he interrupted her quickly.

"You are not to talk, you are to listen," he said, very gently. "Patience is the first step towards making the fight, as your new doctor would tell you."

"Who is this wonderful new doctor? Where did he come from?" broke in Margaret's feebly-excited tones, here.

"He is a friend of Sir John Grantham's,—in fact, I believe some connection of Sir John's, and of the same name; he is a Dr. Grantham,—it was about him that Sir John came to speak with your mother this morn-

ing ; and when I have told you more, and made you understand Sir John's great interest in you, I think you will feel it worth while to be strictly obedient in the use of every effort to gain strength."

"Then you think," she said, with a quivering smile, and something like a sob in her weak voice,—“then you think that I should not make every effort for mamma's sake,—that I have not struggled as I might have done to get well ? that——”

“I think nothing of the sort, my dear child ; just obey me, now, be quiet, don't talk, but listen, and you will see what I mean. I think you have been just as brave as you could be. I know, and your mother knows, all that you would bear and do for her sake. But as you are now, in your present state of weakness, without this wonderful new restorative, which I hope Dr. Grantham's prescription will bring you, struggles and efforts would be utterly useless,—in short, to speak plainly, would only hasten the end. And if it were not for this coming restorative, I should not dare to tell you now some-

thing which we have long known, but have kept from you from fear of adding to your grief, or harming you by increased agitation. Now that we have gained this new hope of recovery for you, your mother thinks that the fact should not be kept from you any longer, that for your own sake, for Sir John's sake, you ought to know it, and I cannot but believe that, in spite of yourself, you will find it act as a stimulus, by giving you a new reason to desire to live. Your mother and I both feel sure that when you have heard it, you will be even more anxious to try the new remedy than you are now. I am afraid, however, that it may prove a hard trial to you at first, and,—in short, as I have said, I could not risk the weakening effects of the agitation, which I fear it must cause you, if we had not Dr. Grantham's extraordinary medicine to restore the lost power, and enable the new stimulus to be of use to you."

"I can't think what it can be! What could there be, now, to make my life seem more worth having than it does already?"

Of course it is of use, for mamma's sake, and other people's sake."

"Yes,—it will be of use—of infinite use," returned Mr. Thomas. "Are you prepared now to hear something very startling? Something which if you had heard it a year ago, might have appeared to you too good news to be true?"

"Yes,—I am ready,—answered Margaret, faintly. "But—does mamma know that you are going to tell me now? Mayn't I have her with me? If—who knows what may happen, if it is very strange and hard to bear?"

"I will call Mrs. Willoughby, if you like. I left her engaged with Sir John."

"Oh, is he still here? I fancied he had gone,—that I heard his voice in the hall, as he was leaving, some time ago. I had been dreaming about him,—such a strange, confused dream! I must have been still dreaming, I suppose, when I thought I heard his voice, for it did not sound like his, altogether."

"Whose did it sound like?"

Margaret was silent, but Mr. Thomas determined to follow the lead of her thought.

“Did it sound like—like Charles Meredith’s voice?” he said. “Forgive me, I have a reason for asking.”

“Oh, don’t let us talk of him now,” she returned, with a sort of shudder, and with something almost stern about her altered voice and manner.

“Ah, but I must speak of him, for I have something to say to you about him, and I want first to tell you that—that you need not give up hope,—that Sir John Grantham;”—he spoke huskily, and in a hesitating nervous manner, and Margaret did not believe him; she thought that he spoke of hope only as a means of making the coming revelation seem to her more bearable when it came. “Sir John Grantham,” he went on, quickly, has had more personal interest in the matter than you are aware of, more reason for making every effort. For—for a wonderful discovery was made not long ago. You remember nurse Gilling’s secret,—old Gilling’s strange behaviour? The secret came out before the old man’s death; he made confession of having had a part in a piece of

foul play. Sir John Grantham's son did not die as a baby. The child was exchanged for a dead baby born at the same time ; and this baby was the child of Mr. and Mrs. Meredith." He paused here, for he perceived that Margaret understood and anticipated the revelation he had been about to make.

Her agitation was so great as the quick flow of thought rushed over her, bringing with it a momentary sense of the joy that might have been, that he began to fear that his experiment had been a failure ; and as he looked on at the state of complete exhaustion which followed upon alarming breathlessness and faintness, he anathematised the blunder that he had made. There was nothing for it, however, now, but to go forward, and when his remedies had relieved her, and restored to her composure and a little strength,

"You will understand now," he said, "that he loves you as a daughter, that he needs the sort of comfort that she whom his son loves best could give him."

Ah, the experiment had been no failure, so far, after all ! As she looked up to answer him, there was a touch of added power about her face. There was an expression that seemed to give a promise of new-coming vitality, in her looks and in the tone of her voice, and in the steadfast earnest manner with which she spoke. The revelation had acted as a preparatory stimulus which would enable her to meet the coming shock of joy better than she could have done without it.

“You are right,” she said. “This will add an interest, and give, I hope, a farther use to my life. It will be a blessing to be allowed to comfort his father ; and thank you for your way of putting it, Mr. Thomas,—I mean for speaking of *that* love as living, for you say, ‘whom his son *loves*.’ ”

“Well, and I have more to tell you,” went on Mr. Thomas, “I have to tell you that you must not think of him as dead, for his father does not.”

“But a pretended hope is no comfort,” said Margaret, sadly.

“This need be no pretended hope. Listen. You heard of Lord Mark Denham’s disappearance, and of how his sisters first feared,—and gradually lost every vestige of hope that it was possible for him ever to turn up again. He *has* turned up again.”

“Thank God!” cried Margaret, her eyes suddenly filling with tears of sympathy and gladness.

Here was a new stimulus,—a glad preparation for the shock of joy about to fall upon her!

“And why,” continued Mr. Thomas, “why may it not have been so in the other case? Miss Willoughby, we have real reason to believe that it is so,—that he is alive, that you will see him soon!”

It had fallen. It had been met and comprehended! She did not faint. She gave no cry. She did not weep or sob. She said no word of thankfulness or joy! She sat up with the strength of intense excitement, and clasped hold of her friend’s hand, and looked into his face with such a look in the upturned eyes, and such a look on the parted lips, as

it would be hard to describe, or even faintly to express.

“Yes,” he answered, to the question her countenance was asking,—“yes, it is true, it is quite true! So for his sake you must now be very still and patient, you must not exert yourself or excite yourself,—you must lean back and rest, while I tell you something of the truth,—of the story which he himself will tell you fully when he comes.”

Then she leaned back and looked up at him silently,—for her feeling was too intense to allow her to speak,—looked up at him still with that wondering, inquiring, eager look,—still with that wonderful light that seemed to be reflected from some inner source, some light of Life and Love that had been with her always, that had all in a moment flashed out with clearer revelation, that might (for was it not too bright and beautiful to last?)—that might be about to pass away, and leave her in a darkness deeper than she had ever known before.

By degrees, while Mr. Thomas spoke, she took the story home to her heart as a living

fact. It was!—yes it was! She should see him,—most really,—most actually again! Ah, if she were to die the very instant after that meeting had come about, would it not have been worth while to have lived on earth only for that blessed moment's sake? How could she have existed so long,—and have gone on so quietly from day to day,—without knowing of this, which now seemed to form a necessary part of existence?

Gradually, gently, lingeringly, Mr. Thomas told her the story of life, while she lay still, drinking in the words, until at length, with an abrupt movement, suddenly startling him into silence,

“He is here!” she cried,—“he is here, I am sure, I am sure he is here! It was his voice that I heard! I felt him. I felt that something strange and wonderful had happened! Let me see him! Please let me see him? Why has he not come up to me before this?”

“Do you think you are equal to seeing him now?”

“Equal!”

“This new doctor? Is not one enough?”

“Dr. Grantham! Ah, I see!”

He had brought a smile to her face.

She was looking more natural now. With all his clumsiness, he thought he had managed to break the news to her better than he had believed possible. But the danger was not over yet! And as he looked back from the door on his way from her room, on her emaciated face, transfigured into a life which seemed as if it could not belong to it, he realised afresh how frail, how tender, all that remained of her physical being was.

CHAPTER IX.

ALMOST before Mrs. Willoughby had sighed out her feeling of wonder and longing, Mr. Thomas entered. He was looking grave but not despondent.

“She knows!” he cried, in a tone of suppressed feeling. “She has borne the shock of joy better than I had dared to expect. She is much excited now, but you must go to her,”—and he looked towards Charles Grantham,—“you must go to her at once. You must be very careful, though. Are you to be trusted?”

A change came over Charles Grantham’s face, but he said no word. A pressure of deepest joy and hope and fear was overpowering him, as he followed Mr. Thomas out of the drawing-room, and up to the room where Margaret lay on her sofa expecting him.

Another moment, and her door had been opened, and the two were together again, alone !

What had happened? Had Margaret reached the heaven of which she had been daily dreaming? Was she dreaming still? What meant this life of supremest bliss into which she had suddenly been uplifted? Whose arms were these about her? Whose lips were touching hers? What was this love which was drawing hers, and raising it, and rising with it? What was this love,—this life? What was this life which these two spiritual beings were living, while the moments of earth passed over their heads? The moment, passed, but the life passed not! The moments passed,—but the love,—a love which was resting in the Love Eternal,—could never pass. The moments passed, but the Life in which those two were meeting, would endure for evermore. They might be parted from it,—but it could never pass away, and be as though it had not been.

But the moments passed,—the moments during which words were impossible. The

moments of divine silence passed, and they spoke,—a few broken words, a few broken sentences,—only. Who could say what the words were which were spoken between them?

But these moments also passed, and soon they were talking together; until, presently,

“My darling,” he said, quickly, but in a very low and gentle voice, that was as music in her ears, “you are tired?”

“Tired! I wish I might always be tired like this!”

Ah, the satisfied sigh, and the smile which accompanied her words! Who could make you know the exquisitely tender sweetness of the life which thrilled through him, as he heard, and as he saw? He answered only with a touch and with a smile, which brought an answering thrill of blessedness for Margaret.

“If this might go on always! If nothing need come to make a change!” she said.

“Except the change of health and strength for you, my darling!”

“I don’t feel as if that could ever be,”

answered Margaret. I feel as if we should just pass, you and I together, as we are, into the Invisible World in which I dreamed you were. It would not be dying. It would just be moving with this life into fuller life. I don't feel as if earth could ever come back again for me ! ”

Then Charles Grantham remembered that he was also Dr. Carl, and with his doctor's eyes he looked with alarm at the wasted face and hands, and at all the signs of delicacy and loss of physical life apparent in her ; and now a momentary touch of the keen pain of despair came thrilling through him, with the dearness of her love for him !

But he did not allow her to know that it had been so.

“ We will live in that Invisible Life,—that Invisible Life of Love, together on earth,” he said, with many meanings in his words, while many recollections, connecting themselves with the words which she had spoken to him long years ago, when as Charles Meredith he had first told her of his love,—words which had burnt into his soul and

been engraved there,—came floating about, and making harmony in his mind. “I have all sorts of visions before me,” he went on, “of what we will see and do together, when you have recovered your strength again. In our fuller life, we will walk again through the streets of Fribourg, remembering the dear old days,—the old joys, in the new more perfect fuller joys,—remembering the old live of lonely work, in the new life of work together. In our fuller life we will travel amongst the mountains, and with our invisible eyes we will see together, more than we see with our visible eyes.

“Together!” That was the word which struck home to her while he spoke! She was not entering into all his thoughts. She was only feeling that to be with him always, now, always,—here,—anywhere,—was life, was love for her!

“We could not be apart,” she said, “whatever happened. I have learnt to know this! I felt you with me when you were far away. Your spirit touched mine, from those mountains where you were think-

ing of me, and loving me. And if *I only* died,—still we should be together, more closely than if we were separated on earth. We *could not* be apart.”

“But you will not die,” he answered, and once more he remembered that he was Dr. Carl, but this time the remembrance brought with it hope.

As he spoke, and as he remembered and thought, there came a knock at the door. It was opened. Mr. Thomas’ head was thrust in.

“I have come to move that this meeting do now adjourn,” he said.

“Soon,—not just yet. It has not completed its business yet, has it?” and the speaker glanced towards Margaret.

“Not yet, Mr. Thomas! He has told me nothing yet of all that has been happening to him, this long time,—or of all that has made him look so ill. And indeed I am resting. Please let him stay a little longer?”

“I see I must call in Dr. Carl for a consultation,” returned Mr. Thomas. “I am

sure that he will agree with me in thinking that there has been quite enough agitation and excitement, for one day.” And he was right, Dr. Carl dared not disagree with Mr. Thomas.

“I will give you half a minute in which to make the adieux so necessary before the long separation of a few hours, and not a moment longer,” returned Mr. Thomas. “And, meanwhile, I will wait for you here, Grantham,” so saying, he withdrew.

And then the parting between the two who had so lately met, took place.

CHAPTER X.

WHILE Charles had been in Margaret's dear presence, his life had seemed to be swallowed up in the intensity of blissful love. Fear and pain had crossed his mind now and again. But joy had returned, and remained, as the quickening spirit of all his thoughts and sensations. But now that he was walking away from The Cottage, side by side with Mr. Thomas, a very heavy load of grief lay at the bottom of his heart. It seemed to him that he had been absent from the earth, and had now returned to it again. It seemed to him that he had been conversing with one "behind the veil," who must soon be lost altogether from his vision. It seemed to him that he had found his darling for a moment, only to lose her again,—for ever!—for ever, so far as life on earth is concerned.

Now that he was absent from her, he realised how fearfully, hopelessly, changed she was!

“I did not know the change would be so complete!” he said, at last, in a broken and dejected tone of voice, which went to his hearer’s heart. “You had not fully prepared me for such emaciation,—for all those looks, those signs of deep decline about her! It is utterly and entirely impossible that she can recover!”

“Wait until you have seen her professionally,—until we have examined her together to-morrow; I think,—I hope,—that you will somewhat alter your verdict, then,” returned Mr. Thomas. But even while trying to comfort his desponding friend, and trying to believe himself in the hope that he was holding out, his heart was sinking lower in the scale that was weighed by fear.

“I must go back,” he said, with sudden recollection, “for I forgot to arrange with Mrs. Willoughby the hour for our visit to her daughter to-morrow. I shall find her at leisure, for I advised her to leave Miss Willoughby to herself for a minute or two, after your visit was concluded. Do you mind

waiting outside for me?" he added, as they reached the door. "I shall not be a moment."

"I was just going to her," said Mrs. Willoughby, when she and Mr. Thomas had met and arranged for the next day's medical visit. "I do not like leaving her many minutes alone, and I have given her time enough to compose herself, don't you think so?"

"Oh, yes certainly; I will not keep you from her. Good-bye, you will let me know if she should not be so well to-day?" replied Mr. Thomas, and then he turned to leave the house and rejoin his friend.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Willoughby, with a beating heart, went softly upstairs, and along the passage to the door of Margaret's room, where she paused for an instant, to gain courage for entrance. She had been longing for this moment,—longing to see her daughter's joy! Why did it seem so dreadful now that it arrived? It did seem dreadful to her, she could not have told herself why,—it seemed dreadful, however sweet it was to prove in reality.

She opened the door at last,—very, very

gently,—ah, she was glad she had been gentle, for Margaret seemed to be asleep. But how cold the room felt! It could not be really cold, but something made her shiver as she crossed it.

Was Margaret asleep?

It seemed to be a very deep and silent slumber,—and what had gone with the bright hectic colour that had flushed her cheeks so lately? Ah, she was often pale! But Mrs. Willoughby had never seen her pale like that before!—had never seen her face of such a dead, dead white!—had never seen her so motionless,—had never felt her hand so icily, creepily cold!

Mrs. Willoughby turned to ring the bell, and at the same moment called,

“Allnutt!” and the maid, who was close at hand in an inner room, of which the door was ajar, came quickly in.

Where was the use of it all?

Mrs. Willoughby was kneeling down by her daughter's sofa, using every means of restoration, but Margaret became no less motionless,—not a whit less deadly pale and cold.

“Give me the strongest salts, and go down and order Dillon to overtake Mr. Thomas and call him back again immediately.” Mrs. Willoughby spoke calmly,—for her heart was full of despair.

The end had come for her! That was all! What good would it do to make a noise?

Well, they had met again. And, after all, what great gain would there be in a few more years of life and work on earth together? They had met! They had seemed to part,—but they were, in truth, as Margaret had said, inseparable in spirit! What could be better for them than that which in truth was theirs for evermore? Life,—unseen, Eternal,—Life and Love together?

Who thought these thoughts? Who sang this requiem over the unconscious figure that lay on Margaret’s sofa? Surely they must have been whirling about in some one’s mind,—surely it must have sounded through some one’s heart on that most eventful, fearful, hopeful, joyful, and finally most bitter day at Grantham!

CHAPTER XI.

“MARGARET! we must have a ride this morning. It is a delightful day.”

“I am busy,” replied Margaret, bending her head lower over the letter she was writing.

“Oh,—well, then, you are breaking all laws natural, reasonable, and— The fact is, you are a great deal too fond of moping in doors in fine weather, at the hours when it is best for you to be out.”

“H’m! Am I?”

As she spoke, Margaret,—looking perhaps still a little delicate, but healthily bright, and lovelier, more bewitching, than the month of May had ever seen her look before,—rose from her seat, and, walking towards the open window, was immediately taken into the arms of some one who stood at its threshold.

“Am I?” she repeated, as soon as Charles Grantham had released her. “Indeed! I am glad you know so much about me, Dr. Carl. It so happens that I have been out of doors the greater part of the morning; looking out for some one who had promised to ride with me to-day. I kept on thinking I heard you call, but it always proved to be a thrush or a nightingale, wishing me many happy returns of the day. *They* all seem to have remembered that it was my birthday.”

“Your birthday? and you never told me?”

“Told you! No, I thought you ought to divine it. However, I got tired at last, and came in, and it is too late to ride now.”

“All my father’s fault!” said Charles, in a tone of good-humoured grumble. “How he managed to exist before he found me, is a mystery! He always has a thousand things that he wants to consult me about, or that he wants me to do, for him or with him; and that’s how my mornings go! and then you pretend to think it too late to ride!”

“Stamping along the lawn, and standing outside the window as if you were a beggar!—nearly frightening me out of my senses! and then calling out as if the notion had just struck you all of a sudden, ‘Margaret, shall we have a ride?’”

“Seeing you *un-habited* and scribbling, I supposed the idea of riding would come to you as a new one. And perhaps it is too late.”

“Too late? Who says it is too late? I shall be ready in a minute. You may as well come inside, for that length of time?”

“No, I *am* a beggar, and besides, my boots are dirty. Thank you for granting me grace. I will wait about here until you come down.”

“But I don’t think we will ride, after all! It is much too late; and besides, it would be a sin to stay indoors another moment, such a heavenly May Day! Here is my hat; I will come out with you for a saunter, and we will ride this afternoon. There,—now let us go this way,—to the wood! So you don’t like your father? I’m sorry for that.”

“Ah, a May gosling, I see! I had forgotten about this birthday of yours being May Day, and I could not conceive what made you so foolish. Do I dislike my father? Well, not altogether, I think, now you ask me; and,”—changing his tone,—“jesting apart, I continually wonder afresh, as I have often told you, how I contrived to avoid discovering, years ago, that he forms a necessary part of my life,—that I myself, as I am, could not have been without him.”

“But how about those poor foster-parents? I am sorry for them!—thrust out into the cold, by the ungrateful person upon whom they spent their substance for so many years!—that ‘best of fathers,’ whom you used to be so fond of talking about!”

“Ah,—there is the wonderful part of it. They are not thrust out into the cold, or one whit the less dear, because this other ‘best of fathers,’ and the mother belonging to him, have turned up.”

“Well, at all events, I am glad they have bought Arlington House. We might ride there, might not we, this afternoon?—see

how the alterations are going on, and meditate upon a new name for it, instead of the horribly cockney one that those poor unfortunate Craycrofts gave to it. I was writing to Constance Meredith when you came down upon me just now. It is a great pity, by the by,—” Margaret paused, looking, with a laugh in her eyes, up at Charles Grantham.

“ Well ? ”

“ She is the nicest girl I know, and the prettiest, and the pleasantest,” went on Margaret. “ If only I had been dead that time when mamma thought I was. If only you had all given me up as a bad job instead of working at me so diligently, until you had brought me to life again,—if only I had died, when you thought I was going to die,—there might have been such a beautiful little romance ! It is a thousand pities ! I don’t wonder at your looking sad. I feel quite unhappy when I think of what my recovery spoilt ! and it would have been so easy to die.”

She laughed merrily as she rattled on ;

while a shadow deepened on Charles Grantham's face, and he half turned away from her, with something like a shudder. The horror of the past fear and danger, of which *she* could speak so lightly, was over him, almost as a present misery in the midst of present bliss.

“Margaret!” He spoke her name almost below his breath, and she pretended not to hear.

“It would have been much less trouble. I used sometimes to think that really it would be quite pleasant to die, with all of you standing by, caring about me so much! And if only I had seen Constance then, I am sure I should not have thought it worth while to struggle to live as I did! It was very stupid of me!” and she laughed again.

“Margaret!” he cried again,—and this time, turning suddenly, he clasped her in his arms, with a grip as tight as though he had believed that the mighty power of death was close at hand to try to tear her from his grasp.

“Margaret!”

An interval of silence followed upon the utterance of that name, in Charles Grantham's low, passionate, tenderly-reproachful tones.

After which their talk flowed on in an altered strain.

While they were engaged in this talk, which it is not lawful to repeat, their footsteps led them unawares, to the scene of that moon-light *tête-à-tête* which had been disastrously interrupted, close upon nine years before. Did the recollection of that long-past evening flash across their memories, as moonbeams in a dream might seem to turn and flash and mingle with the brilliantly-falling light of day? Did they remember it, while they stood together by the trellis-work summer-house, half in shadow, half in slanting sunshine? Did they remember it while her face was raised to his, and while her eyes, radiant with another and a tenderer light than the light of the sun, or of the moon, were meeting his, and drawing from their gaze meanings even more divine than it had expressed for her, in that minute of revelation of several years gone by? Did

the life of the days that were 'no more' add new sweetness to their present living blessedness? Did they remember?—

Hark! A footstep! A voice!—a call!

They started, as though indeed they were afraid that the crafty wizard, who then had worked them woe, was again at hand to draw the cup of gladness from their lips.

They started, and turned to see,—

Only Mrs. Willoughby!

No! No startlingly-unexpected events or incidents of disaster, pain, sorrow, or joy were to fall for them again yet awhile. They might bask serenely in the sunshine of their present blessings.

The intruder was only Mrs. Willoughby, with a face a little more worn than it had been of yore,—with hair a little grayer, and with a countenance that was unspeakably sweet and pleasant to behold! It was peculiarly pleasant at the present moment, as with a bright smile, and a slight flush of shy apologetic confusion, she glanced at the pair before her, and then began to move herself out of their way.

“I beg pardon! I thought you were alone, Margaret,” she said.

“Don’t go, mother darling, you are wanted here. We have quite done with each other, have not we?” said Margaret, with a look towards the other half of *we*.

“Oh, quite! Quite entirely!” was the answer.

“And you must help us to settle our plans.”

“Which means, being strictly interpreted, that I am to hear what plans are already in contemplation?”

“Well, yes,—perhaps so; you come into them, with or without your consent; and Fribourg comes into them,—and poor little Fritz. When Dr. Carl was at Fribourg the other day, he promised Fritz and his grandmother that he would bring me to see them. And *you* are going to join us at Fribourg. Do you hear?”

“Indeed! Well what you order I suppose must be done. But I think we had better wait until August arrives, before quite settling that part of the programme.”

“Oh,—you may very likely have to be sent away first; that is another matter. But what we have settled *is* settled, and will have to be carried out,—as you will find,—to your cost I was going to say,—and I fear not without some shadow of truth. But that can’t be helped. We have both been agreeing that you don’t look at all the thing, and that you slave yourself a great deal too much, and walk about a great deal too much, and that you want a thorough change.”

“I shall have the change of trousseau-hunting, I suppose, shortly.”

“Yes, that will be nice and restful for you! Well,—when we return we will have a delightful holiday. You hear, I suppose, that the Merediths,—all four of them,—are coming to stay at the Hall before the end of June, and that we are to have all manner of entertainments,—evening parties of the pleasant old-fashioned kind, and so forth?”

“Yes, I have been sitting with Lady Grantham, and we have been doing a little in the way of arranging plans, also. I must tell you about them presently.”

“And as I seem to be really done with, and put aside, I think I had better take my leave here,” interposed Charles, as they neared the cottage door.

“Oh, must you?” Margaret turned round and faced him as he spoke, with a tender and wistful look that was a reflection of the grief of eight months ago. It was a look that often stole into the brightness of her countenance.

“Cannot you come in for luncheon?” said Mrs Willoughby.

“No, thanks, not if I am to ride with Margaret by-and-by. I have letters to write.”

“I know,” said Margaret to her mother, when they were alone together, “the history of one of those important letters. It is to Dr. Stultz; he told me about some of his old Fribourg people. He seems to have been very kind to little Fritz and others. Charles would have liked to make another home for himself and me at Fribourg (you would have had to live with us!), and to carry on the old work, and come to Grantham for long

visits. But it seems hard upon his poor old father to have to lose him just as he has found him ! and he says it is as much his duty as his pleasure to live at home. He says the people will be well looked after, by priests and nuns and all manner of good people ; and he will give prescriptions, and medicines, and go on helping in all sorts of ways."

May passed;—an ideal May ! There is no need to descant upon its beauty ; or to tell of all that its sounds, and scents, and harmony of colouring, said and sang and echoed and re-echoed, in a variety of unfailingly-melodious voices and tones,—for the betrothed !

June passed,—an ideal June ! There is no need, either, to tell of all that the spirits that lived in the vast world of its roses, had to say to—the betrothed !

July passed,—an ideal July ! Was the summer, as a whole, ideal?—for commonplace people, for those whose feet were touching the earth as they walked?—or were its lingering sunshine and steadfast

heaven of blue, reflections from rays which warmed and beautified the ideal (but not the less real) world in which the betrothed were living and moving?

The day arrived,—the third of August,—the wedding-day!—gorgeous with its brilliant sun, its pure and deep blue sky, its masses of flowers and fruit, its stretches of ripening corn, and purple shades of distance.

The wedding was a success; every one said so.

Lord Mark Denham was Best man.

Constance Meredith was chief bridesmaid. The chief bridesmaid was a very lovely and a very charming girl. Perhaps Lord Mark Denham may have been very much bewitched by her. I do not say that it was so. For I wish your last glances to be at the Bride and Bridegroom, as they travelled lingeringly through old towns to Fribourg,—rested there awhile, proceeded to the Highlands of Switzerland, wandered amongst the mountains, and finally returned to Fribourg, where Mrs. Willoughby awaited them.

The honeymoon was over then! But an

enjoyable, although by no means idle, time was spent by the three, in the old town they loved so well. They left it at last with many regrets, and having made many promises to return again, and frequently.

But by the beginning of October, partings and farewells had been superseded by meetings and welcomes which were overwhelming in the fulness of their joy. Who could find colours glowing enough in which to paint the gladness of that Home-coming? Not I;—and yet to find colours in which to paint its brightness were comparatively easy! Who could paint the tender shade that mingled with and softened,—without decreasing from their brilliancy,—its glowing tints? Who could give the delicate undertones of regret over days that were ‘no more,’—over the change from the coming to the come? Love knows no fulness of satisfaction upon earth, without these tenderly-regretful touches amidst the joy which is immortal. For they are touches from the hand of that Death by which we rise in the scale of the Life that knows no end.

Reflections from this Life and this Love, would have brightened Mrs. Willoughby's seemingly lonely home, even if it had not been made cheerful and pleasant by its nearness to the home of her daughter and son-in-law at the Hall.

That that home seemed to them perfection, as they began to settle down, and taste of its blessedness, will easily be understood. Therefore I have nothing left to tell, but that Dr. Carl is already almost as much beloved and revered in the village of Grantham, and the poor streets of Darlington, as he is by the poor and sick in the picturesque old town of Fribourg.

And so my story ends,—a fragment only. For the history of the lives of which it speaks flows on, with ever widening and deepening interests, and will flow on, branching out into other histories, which may or may not find some one to gather up and relate, their varied events and incidents.

THE END.



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